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THE CARDINAL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE DUCHESS,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1854.

LONDON:

Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

INTRODUCTION.

IN the year 1719, George I. filled the throne of Great Britain. Still his seat was by no means a secure one. The Stuarts, the rightful heirs to the Crown, if there be aught of Divine right in the succession of kingdoms, had a strong party in the country ; and though the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715 had been successfully put down, it was notorious that its embers rather slumbered than were extinguished. What contributed, perhaps, even more than internal discontent to keep up its dormant fires, was external agency.

In all the continental wars which England

had waged since 1688, the cause of the exiled family had, as a matter of course, been taken up by her opponents, as the simplest and most natural mode of diverting the strength of the British Government from foreign objects, by giving it employment at home. Such had been the constant policy of Louis XIV. during the long struggle which terminated in the Peace of Utrecht; and since his death, the system had been continued by every nation which threatened or offered hostilities, and more especially by Spain.

That monarchy, while Charles of Austria ruled it, had been the most powerful in Europe, from the talents of its Sovereign, the character of its population, and its immense territorial extent. The three causes of supremacy were short-lived. Under Philip II., indeed, the still unexhausted energy of the empire continued to impart to its successor a momentary vitality; but each tenant of the throne grew weaker, in proportion as he was removed from the parent intellect; and under Philip III., Philip IV., and Charles II., the royalty of Spain descended in turns from

the bigot to the voluptuary, and from the voluptuary to the dotard. The people, too, shared the decay. A common object, the conquest of the Moors, had forced them into greatness by the necessity for daily and combined action; but the virtue disappeared with the cause which produced it. Then came the effect of the gold of the New World. The wealth won without labour demoralized them; the folly of one king by the expulsion of the Moriscoes, exiled the most industrious part of the population; the superior fanaticism of another lost the one half of the Netherlands, and paralyzed the remainder; while the younger branch of the royal house possessed themselves of the original patrimony of their race—the German territory, and no small portion of the north of Italy. Thus weakened alike by the deterioration of rulers and subjects, and the dismemberment of many of its fairest provinces, Spain, at the death of Charles II. without children, presented but an enfeebled kingdom. Such as it was, however, its possession became an object of ambition to the greater dynasties of Europe.

The history of the War of the Succession is well known. On the one side, Louis XIV. insisted on placing the crown of Spain on the head of his grandson, partly on the ground of a will of King Charles II. in his favour, and partly on account of his descent from Maria Teresa, the wife of Louis, and the Infanta of Spain. England, on the other hand, and Austria supported the claims of the Arch-Duke Charles, a prince of the house of Hapsburgh.

The contest was long and varied in its fortunes. The Catalonians and Valencians adopted the cause of the Austrian — the Castilians that of the Duke of Anjou, or as he was called Philip V. The two competitors for the throne, equally contemptible in character and conduct, possessed and exercised little influence over the events with which their names were connected. The real struggle was between France and England. On the one side was Lord Peterborough, better known as the chivalrous Lord Mordaunt, together with Lord Stanhope and the Earl of Galway. On

the other, were the Duke of Orleans, the Duke of Vendôme, and the Duke of Berwick, the son of Arabella Churchill by King James, and nephew of Marlborough. The fortunes of the French prevailed. The battles of Almanza and Villa Viciosa secured the crown to the grandson of Louis, and the peace of Utrecht terminated a war which involved England in an enormous mass of debt, and was as unjustifiable in its objects as the partition of Poland.

While the hostile armies were alternately conquering or losing the Spanish provinces, the semblance of a government was carried on at Madrid by Philip V., or rather by the Princess of Ursins. This extraordinary woman—the Camerera Mayor, or, as we should phrase it, the Mistress of the Robes to the Queen—ruled over Spain for twelve years with absolute authority. The influence she possessed, though, in some degree, the consequence of her own talent and energies, derived its chief strength from the facility of temper of the two sovereigns. On the Queen's death, it was decided that the King should marry again, and when to the female

Prime Minister was left the selection of the bride, it became to her a matter of the last importance, that the future mate of the head of the monarchy should resemble her predecessor and her husband in her disposition to obey. The possession of this quality by a Princess of Parma had been guaranteed to Madame des Ursins by an Italian abbé of the name of Alberoni; and it formed, in fact, the chief reason for the elevation of Elizabeth Farnese to the Spanish throne.

The praise, if it were praise, was undeserved. Alberoni had deceived his patroness. The new consort of Philip possessed a spirit not only haughty but imperious, and on her first interview with the Camerera Mayor, had her arrested and sent into exile. The scheme had been devised beforehand by Alberoni himself, and the Queen (for Philip's indolence prevented his interfering) repaid the obligation by making her wily counsellor Prime Minister. The Pope, ever eager to honour rising power, bestowed a Cardinal's hat, and an unknown priest became at once one of the princes of the Church, and

the wielder of the destinies of a mighty empire.

The political neophyte was not unequal to the task. He had considerable talents, and, had they been applied to the peaceful development of the wealth of the Peninsula, his name would have gone down to posterity as that of a great minister. Unfortunately, his useful qualities were neutralized by an extravagant ambition, and the state of Europe offered an apparent facility for the gratification of it.

Louis XIV. was dead ; Louis XV., his great-grandson, was a boy ; and the Duke of Orleans, the first prince of the blood, was at the head of the French government, under the name of Regent. This office Alberoni claimed for his master, who was the young King's uncle and nearest relative ; while at the same time he demanded for the children of the new Queen of Spain a sovereignty in Italy. The propositions were not extravagant in themselves, but behind them lurked schemes which threatened the tranquillity of half Europe, and these, as

they became developed, awoke general alarm and opposition.

The minister of Philip met the storm bravely. His talents breathed at once into the Spanish executive a vitality which it had not known for a century. Troops were raised, fleets built and manned, and money liberally contributed by the middle-classes and the grantees. Nor were his exertions merely confined to the interior of Spain. They made themselves felt in every part of Europe. He had to fear the opposition of Austria, of England, of Holland, and of France. He determined to find them employment at home. He bribed the Turks to attack the Emperor. He persuaded Charles XII. of Sweden, just returned from his Ottoman prison, and in want of somebody to fight with, to take up the cause of the Pretender, and support the Jacobite party in England. He lulled the Dutch into neutrality by a commercial treaty ; and, through the medium of his ambassador at Paris, the Prince of Cellamare, formed a powerful conspiracy against the regent Duke of Orleans.

In the first instance fortune favoured him, and the Spanish troops took with facility possession of Sardinia and Sicily. But all at once the luck turned. The English fleet, under Byng, annihilated the Spanish navy off Syracuse; the Turks were defeated by the Imperialists; Charles XII. was killed at Frederickshall; the conspiracy of the Prince of Cellamare was discovered; and the Duke of Berwick, at the head of a French army, entered Spain, and after besieging with success Fontarabia, and St. Sebastian, threatened the very existence of the monarchy.

The near approach of danger terrified Philip and his Queen out of their apathy, and they insisted on the Cardinal accepting the truce which the allies offered, and peace once more reigned in Europe.

Alberoni did not intend it to be permanent. He had accepted the suspension of arms merely to gain time for arranging his future operations, and while in public he breathed only the most pacific intentions, he was in fact busily employed in collecting forces and funds for a future struggle.

Nor were the allies idle. They were not deceived by the meek professions of their ecclesiastical opponent; and as George I. had no wish to go back to his electorate, or the Regent Orleans to descend from sovereign power to the rank of a prince of the blood, they determined on removing from the Spanish executive, a man, who had proved himself alike to have the means and the will to endanger their position.

Many and various were the discussions on the subject between the representatives of the allied princes, and it is while the Italian priest is still all powerful at Madrid, and France and England are combining in the hope of effecting his downfall, that begins our story.

THE CARDINAL.

CHAPTER I.

IRUN.

THERE are few more lovely localities on earth than that which meets the eye of the traveller who approaches from France the Spanish frontier. The undulating country through which he pursues his southward route is dotted over with villages, and has its inequalities richly clothed with oak and chestnut. On the right is the ocean, lashing against the iron-bound coast of Spain. On the left, and further inland, towers the great mountain wall of the Pyrenees; while in front runs the Bidassoa, bathing with its waters the picturesque Moorish stronghold of Fontarabia.

The ancient highway which leads from Paris to Madrid crosses the river, (the boundary of the rival empires,) near the island which was the celebrated seat of the conference that ended in the marriage of Louis XIV. with the Infanta Maria Theresa. Almost from its bank, the road rises rapidly until it reaches Irun, the northernmost of the Spanish post-towns, and distant a league and a-half from the French frontier.

It was about six o'clock of the morning of the 23rd of October, 1719, that the little burgh seemed gradually throwing off its slumbers and preparing for the labours of the day. In the main street was the principal inn, distinguished by its superior size to the buildings around it, but more especially by some muleteers, who were partly congregated near its entrance, and partly employed in leading backwards and forwards their mules to water at a stream in the neighbourhood. Over the great gate, and in one of the verandahs opening from the solitary sitting-room, stood the host himself, in dirty shirt, loose brown cloth small-clothes, and worsted stockings, all somewhat the worse for wear. A pair of san-

dals were upon his feet, and his face and chin showed a perfect unacquaintance with soap or razor since last fête-day. The Boniface was enjoying his cigarito, or paper cigar, and occasionally interchanging with the group below a half sentence, uttered with that listless apathy which marks in Spain the man and the class. For though a Spanish innkeeper understands making out a bill and pillaging the unfortunate victims who trust themselves to the protection of his roof as well as any of the fraternity, he is still too conscious of his rank and personal importance to trouble himself about the wants or comforts of his guests.

The apathy, however, of the posadero of Irun, and that of his companions, was in some degree broken by the appearance of an ecclesiastic, evidently the parish priest, who approached for the purpose of taking his usual cup of chocolate, and hearing the news of the day. The new comer was a little thin man, with a hooked nose, and a deep-set, piercing black eye. The physiognomy and person had something of an Arab character; they were spare and thin; and, if any opinion might be formed from their outline and expression, with

abundance of latent energy. The step, notwithstanding, affected timidity, and the whole manner, was that of one who plays a part, yet is not sufficiently an actor to leave others unconscious of his acting. To a Spaniard, however, a churchman is always an object of veneration; and the hats of the muleteers and the host were reverentially moved from their heads as they respectfully acknowledged his presence.

The priest, in reply, responded to the courtesy by sweeping the ground with his enormous beaver, whose brim, some eighteen inches in breadth, projected before and behind, but was drawn up tight on either side, and lapped over the crown. He then made his way through the great gate, and by that to the staircase which led from the stable to the apartments of the guests. On mounting it, he entered the public room, from one of the windows of which, the host had been airing himself in the verandah. Again did the master of the house welcome his distinguished visitor, and again the courtesy was replied to by the clerical sombrero sweeping the floor.

“The best of the morning to your reverence!” said the host; “I trust I see you well.”

“Thanks to the Virgin, Don Esteban, never better.”

“And your reverence comes, no doubt, for your chocolate. It shall be prepared on the instant. Jacinta,” cried he, “the chocolate for his reverence;” and without waiting to ascertain whether his instructions were heard, or likely to be obeyed, he advanced to the priest and held out his cigarito. He seemed to be well understood, for the holy father, with a smile and a nod, acknowledged the attention, produced from his side-pocket a bundle of paper cigars, selected one from the number, and availed himself of the light offered him. This done, the parties flung themselves upon benches opposite each other, and continued to smoke gravely for some time without uttering a syllable.

“Well, Don Esteban,” said the priest, at length, “what news this morning?”

“None, your reverence.”

“What! no arrivals last night? I should have thought that the truce after the long war would have covered the road with travellers, and made the fortunes of the inn-keepers.”

“ Why, no, Don Jeronimo ; not much doing. No arrivals since those of the two ladies I told you of yesterday morning.”

“ What ! are they still here ?”

“ Even so.”

“ And their names ?”

“ *Quien sabe.*”

“ But how is it I have never seen them in the public room ?”

“ They keep their chamber, and are waited on by an old gentleman-usher and a waiting-maid.”

“ And where are they going ?”

“ They are bound for Madrid ; and have engaged two litters, and mules for their baggage enough for a Grandee.”

“ And with all this, man, can't you find out their names ?”

“ Why, Don Jeronimo, it is no business of mine ; and I never put my spoon into other people's porridge. All that I know is, the two dames are—one old, and one young ; and from their dress, are clearly enough a *senorita* and her *duenna*.”

“ You are sure that neither of them is a man ?”

“ *Ca*—your reverence, you are mocking me. As for the senorita, she is as handsome a creature as ever wore mantilla, and high-born too, I warrant; and I have enough of the caballero in me to know when I see blue blood in the veins. And then, such eyes—and such a waist! *Ca*. There is not a girl in Aspeitia or Ascoytia fit to hold the candle to her; and they are the handsomest women in the Three Provinces.”

“ No blue blood there, Don Esteban,” said the priest, laughing. “ If old stories be true, the Arabs camped there for a year, and that,” continued he, with a nod, “ if it spoiled the blood, may have something to do with the beauty.”

“ Ho! ho! ho! your reverence is a wag. But blue blood or not, I’ll warrant the senorita as handsome as Donna Florinda.”

“ But the other?” said the persevering priest, who seemed to have some reason for his curiosity.

“ No, Don Jeronimo, she is not a man either, but a thorough-bred duenna, with a toque on her head, and steel busks to her stays, and a hoop so large, that I doubt much if they get

her into the litter. But your reverence is curious? Do you expect any one?"

"No, no, no," said the priest, hurriedly; "I am expecting nothing, Don Esteban, but my chocolate."

"*Madre de Dios*, that's true; I had forgot the chocolate. Jacinta," cried he, raising his voice, but without moving from his seat, "his reverence's chocolate;" and having thus satisfied his conscience as to the proper discharge of his duties as a host, he once more resumed smoking his cigarito.

"And so," continued the priest, "you have had no men travellers?"

"None whatever. But I had forgotten: last night there did take place an arrival in which your reverence would have been much interested."

"Ha!" said the curé, and Don Jeronimo's sleepy eyes sparkled with fire. "And who was that?"

"The deacon and under-deacon of St. Jago de Compostella, bearing a new periwig and pair of small-clothes for the Saint," and Don Esteban crossed himself reverentially.

So did the padre, and with well-affected de-

votion ; but there was a contemptuous curl on the upper lip, which, to a close observer, might have intimated that he did not attach much consequence to the intelligence. He appeared to reflect for some time, and at last, as if uncertain what to say or do, returned to his original subject, and once more, asked for his chocolate. This third intimation of the wants of the holy father, together, perhaps, with a certain irritation in the tones of his voice, seemed to rouse Don Esteban into something more than ordinary activity, for he gathered himself up from his seat and proceeded lazily towards the kitchen to stimulate, by his presence, the lagging movements of the kitchen maid.

The priest took immediate advantage of his absence, and proceeded with a rapid, but quiet, step to the window, from which he cast an eager look up and down the street. There was nothing apparently important enough to attract his notice, for the loungers at the door had disappeared, and had made their way to the kitchen, where their attentions completely monopolizing the thoughts of the gay Jacinta, had been the cause of the delay in the preparation of the

priest's chocolate. The only other tenants of the thoroughfare were some peasants, taking their tomatoes to market, and a man in a muleteer's dress, who was conducting to the river three remarkably fine mules in high condition. The priest seemed to watch him closely; and then, as he heard Don Esteban returning, retreated hastily to his seat, muttering to himself, "That can't be the man—and I am ruined for ever with the Cardinal if I make a blunder; but I must fish out of that stupid owl of a posadero, if he knows anything of him, for he is no member of my flock, or of this neighbourhood."

The host returned, and was followed by Jacinta, bearing the chocolate. The damsel, confident in her beauty, seemed to have no fears of any reproaches for her delay, and by the coquettish curtsy which she dropped to the curé in presenting it, intimated distinctly enough that the admiration which she had excited in the kitchen, by no means indisposed her for admiration in the parlour.

Whatever reply her roguish glance might have received in the confessional, it awoke on the present occasion no sympathetic answer.

On the contrary, the priest regarded her with a grave, but a steady glance, and having slightly waved his hand, accompanied with a *benedicite mi hija*, accepted the chocolate. Jacinta seemed abashed by the holy father's eye, and, without exhibiting further giddiness, retired, and the curé and the host were once more left alone.

Don Jeronimo sipped for some time his chocolate in silence.

The Boniface had lighted another cigarito.

The priest spoke at length, scarcely moving the cup from his lips, with his eyes half closed, and his words dropped lazily from his mouth, as if the exertion of utterance was great, and the subject one in which he took little interest.

“You are getting rich, Don Esteban.”

“Holy mother, how can your reverence say that! Since the year of our Lord 1700, and the accession of Don Philip, this miserable kingdom of Spain has been the seat of almost perpetual war, and how can an innkeeper make money if there be no travellers?”

“Tut, tut, my good friend, you have had plenty of French officers passing backwards

and forwards, and Spanish officers ; and English prisoners by the dozen."

" Ah, *senor curé*, it sounds well, but ' fine words butter no parsnips.' These sort of customers are ruin to a *posada*. The soldiers are too strong to pay, and the prisoners too poor. Though I am an innkeeper, I am an old Christian ; but though my blood is as blue as the Cids, I have scarcely a *peseta*. *Madre de Dios!* what made your reverence think I was rich ?"

" Why, those three fine mules that I see coming up the street there. They have been here for a week, and I doubted not they were yours."

" *Vaya!* I wish they were, but I have no such luck ; they belong to that *caballero* who is leading them."

" And who is he ?"

" *Que sé yo ;*" and Don Esteban moved uneasily in his seat, as if the very exertion of thinking who the stranger might be was too much for him.

" And what does he call himself?" said the persevering *curé*.

“Why, I believe he is in the arriero line, and wants to let his mules to travellers.”

“If he has been here for a week, he must have had many opportunities.”

“That’s possible; and, indeed, I recollect hearing say that the senoras up-stairs would have hired him, but he asked too high a price.”

“The fellow must be well to do in the world; for his capa is of the newest, and his mules, though it’s little that a churchman knows of such matters, seem to be good.”

“Good! your reverence. They are the envy of every arriero that enters the stable; better were never sold at Astorga.”

“The fellow,” said the priest, “appears to me to be something like a Gitáno.”

“No, no, a true Christian, Don Jeronimo; it was but yesterday I saw him stick his fork into a lump of pork from the puchero; by our Lady of Pilar, he swallowed it up in a moment. No, no, a true Christian, and no Jew.

“You think, then, my worthy friend, Don Esteban, that those who are not Jews must be Christians,” said the priest, with a contemptuous smile; “but if this fellow be no Gitáno by

blood, he is a Gitáno at least by trade ; for if your opinion be correct, no gipsy horse-dealer in Spain could have chosen better cattle. And how long is he going to remain here ?”

“ *Ca*, who knows ! But, as your reverence says, he must be rich, for he does not spare the chopped straw or the barley ; and so much the better for the posada,” continued the Boniface, with a grin. “ At the price he asks for his mules, he’ll wait some time for a job.”

“ You are fortunate, Don Esteban, in having such permanent customers. And the ladies upstairs, are they going to remain here long ?”

“ By the law, you know (may my malediction be on it), they can only remain three days, and they have been two already. But do you expect any one, Don Jeronimo ? I cannot else think how you can take the trouble to inquire into other people’s affairs. Do you expect any one, I say ?”

“ No, no, my worthy friend, a bad habit and pure idleness. But who comes here ?”

The priest’s question was suggested by the well-known crack of a French postilion’s whip, and, hurrying to the window, Don Jeronimo, whose curiosity appeared insatiable, beheld

advancing, at a rapid pace, two horsemen. One was a traveller; the other a postilion from the French post-house. They made for the door of the inn, and as soon as they had reached it, the former jumped from his steed, and having received a pair of small saddle-bags from his companion, paid and dismissed him. The post-boy and his horses immediately proceeded to retrace their steps towards Behobia. The traveller remained in the street, and watched their progress, till they had got beyond the town and its lounging population. He then made his way into the stable, and with the air of one who well understood the character of the locality, mounted the staircase which led from it, and entered the room in which had taken place the conversation now related, and which was still tenanted by the master of the house and Don Jeronimo.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONTRABANDISTA.

THE new comer was a young man of about three and twenty. He was tall and well made, and with a face which, remarkably handsome, owed its charms less to the features, regular and classic though they were, than to its expression. There was a joyousness in the blue eye, and a humour about the mouth which irresistibly attracted the spectator, and which lost nothing of their power from the dare-devil recklessness that, on most occasions under control, still displayed itself at intervals in the confidence of the step, the motions of the body, or even when it was most gay in the glance of

the bright eye. His hair was auburn, and was worn in natural curls, while a moustache of the same colour covered his upper lip.

He was dressed in a dark-blue velvet jacket which scarcely met in front, and was slashed at the elbows and wrists. The waistcoat was richly embroidered with gold thread, while a pair of short breeches of the same material as the jacket, open at the knees, and profusely ornamented there and up the sides with silver buttons dangling from short chains, completed the costume. Round his waist was a broad belt or sash of crimson silk, called a *faja*, while the loose collar of the shirt turned down, as we should say at the present day "*à la Byron*," was confined by a handkerchief of a showy French pattern, having its ends fastened in front by being passed through a seal ring. The lower part of his limbs was covered with jaunty leather gaiters, worked on the edges in Arabesque, and unbuttoned towards the middle of the calf so as to display his stocking of fine material. Over the instep was buckled a pair of large spurs. On his head was a narrow-brimmed peaked hat of velvet, and in his sash the invariable *navaja* or knife.

He carried in his left hand a short double-barrelled carbine, while his right supported his saddle-bags.

All this, which has taken us some time to describe, was gathered at a glance by the two inmates of the chamber. The traveller in the first instance had been apparently unaware of their existence, and had entered the room singing in a joyous tone, "*Yo qui soy contrabandista.*" As soon, however, as he became conscious of their presence he flung down his saddle-bags, and sweeping the floor with his hat, he exclaimed in tones of the greatest politeness, "Good morning cavaliers; good morning to your Reverence; good morning Senor posadero." The courtesy was eagerly returned, and the parties took a survey of each other. Upon the part of the innkeeper the investigation was slight, and the glance careless. On that of the priest the curiosity was more active, for though he endeavoured carefully to veil it from the observation of its object, he did not the less when he thought himself unremarked watch anxiously his looks, person, motions, and every word which fell from his lips.

"Breakfast, my noble host, breakfast imme-

diately," said the new comer. "I've been a-foot since four o'clock, and am nigh famished."

"You forget, your worship," said the inn-keeper, "that this is not a fonda but a posada; but I dare say Jacinta, if you supply her with money, will find the necessary materials."

The traveller awaited no further reply, but seemingly aware that if haste were his object he must superintend the preparations for the meal himself, walked off to the kitchen without another word, and in two minutes after Jacinta was seen to issue from the gateway on her road to the butcher's, the baker's, and the market stalls at a pace, whose unwonted speed argued that either the good looks of the stranger, or his money, had exercised their influence on the avarice or susceptibility of the kitchenmaid. The absence of the traveller was eagerly seized upon by the curé as an opportunity of ascertaining from the host his opinion with regard to the new arrival.

"Well, Don Esteban," said he, pointing to the door of the apartment, through which the new comer had just made his exit; "what do you think of him—what is he?"

"Does your reverence need to ask?" said

the innkeeper with something of astonishment in his tone. "That dress tells its own story. The fellow is a regular *majo*; and who but a *contrabandista* can afford to dress in silks and velvets."

"Likely enough," said the priest. "But is he a Spaniard?"

"Not a doubt of it."

"And from what part of the kingdom?"

"By his ruddy cheeks and his fair hair, from the Three Provinces."

"He speaks Castilian like a *Madrileno*," said the curé.

"*Valgame Dios*, that's natural. Cavaliers in the smuggling trade speak all the languages of Spain. They are constantly on the move, and know everything. But here he comes to answer for himself."

The innkeeper was right. The traveller, who had apparently made the arrangements for his breakfast, now returned to the public room, and selecting from his pouch a Havannah cigar, lighted it, and throwing himself on a bench, commenced smoking with the air of one who was undertaking one of the important duties of the day.

The rich odour diffused itself over the chamber, and gradually invaded the nostrils of the priest, and the master of the house.

“ Oh how delicious,” said the former, “ a puro, a perfect puro.”

The traveller took the hint.—“ Pardon me, senors,” said he, “ I had forgotten ;” and rising, he presented consecutively to the parties his tobacco-pouch. A present so highly valued was eagerly received, and the gratitude of the recipients attested by a profound obeisance. The puros were then lighted, and for some time the parties, abandoning themselves to the enjoyment of the rare luxury, smoked in silence.

“ Your’s is a happy trade, senor cavalier,” said the innkeeper, at length, “ which enables you to smoke such cigars. By our Lady of Pilar, it must be a jolly life ; but I suppose that at the present your worship has not been looking after the tobacco.”

“ Senor posadero,” said the traveller, addressing the innkeeper, “ it is of no use attempting to conceal the matter from a person so quick-sighted as you are. On the other side of the Bidassoa nobody guessed who I was. But no sooner have I entered the posada at

Irún, than you find out at once that I am a contrabandista. Ah, what talent! this comes of birth—this comes of having noble blood.”

The innkeeper stroked his chin and his moustache with the air of one who has received a compliment, but feels that it is deserved.

“But your worship also is no doubt noble. You, too, from your fair hair and bright colour, must be from the Three Provinces.”

“*Perdone, senor,*” said the traveller, with a laugh; “excuse me if for the present, I say nothing with regard to my residence or my birthplace. You know that caballeros in my profession are sometimes on bad terms with the king’s officers.”

“*Ca*—there is no king here. Don Philip is only Lord of Biscay. We have our *Fueros*—we Basques—and don’t trouble ourselves about Customs or Excise.”

“True, my friend, but it may be that I am going as far as Aranda, or it may be to Madrid, and it might just be as well for my own safety that I should not communicate, even to a cavalier so worthy of confidence as yourself, my ordinary residence.”

“There is wisdom in your acts,” said the

curé, taking for the first time a share in the conversation, "for it is alleged that the Cardinal is no friend to the contraband trade. There have been, as I understand, some very severe edicts published lately with regard to gentlemen in your profession, and I think it possible that you may meet with some trouble as soon as you get beyond Vittoria."

"*Vaya*," said the traveller, "a man is only a contrabandista when he has forbidden goods in his pack. 'Till I get my cigars from Gibraltar, or my silks from Rousillon, I am but a gentleman at large, travelling for his pleasure, and in all things a faithful subject of His Majesty, Don Philip, whom the Holy Virgin preserve."

"And where has your worship been lately," said the priest.

"In Flanders, your reverence, and in France. The dames of the Prado are fond of Lyons silks and Mechlin laces, and he that would have doubloons in his pocket must provide them with both."

"And what is the news, senor cavalier, in these countries?"

"None that would interest your reverence.

The Regent gives good suppers in the Palais Royal, and the Duchess of Maine pleasant picnics at Sceaux ; and it is whispered," added he, with a laugh, " that in neither the morning nor the evening festivities are the canons of the Church sufficiently attended to."

" But I spoke of wars and rumours of wars."

" Not a whisper of either, your reverence. Indeed, how could they be looked for when the world is as at present under the rule of the Church. Is not the Cardinal Alberoni prime minister of my sovereign lord, Don Philip? Is not Cardinal Dubois prime minister of his Majesty, Louis XV. and the Duke Regent? Is not Cardinal Sala prime minister of the Emperor? With the world under the rule of the Church we must enjoy peace and tranquillity."

The priest did not seem to relish much the compliment which the history of the last five years had proved to be so totally undeserved. He dissembled, however, his vexation, and said in a gayer tone than usual,

" You appear wondrously skilled, senor, in the affairs of the great world. One would say that you had played your part as a politico as well as a contrabandista.

There was something in the tones of the priest's voice that seemed to attract the attention of the traveller, for he turned sharply round and fixed his eyes on the face of the ecclesiastic as if he would have read in the remark more than the words appeared to warrant. The perpetual smile, however, of the interrogator defied scrutiny.

"Ah, I wish I had such luck," was the reply made at length, and in a joyous tone. "Anything to win a peseta—but I fear I must content myself for the present with silks and laces—and here comes Jacinta with my breakfast."

The viands were placed on the table, and the traveller, after having given to his companions the customary invitation to join him, and received the customary thanks and refusal, proceeded to discuss the meal alone.

When it was over he inquired of the host if there were any muleteers waiting for a job. The innkeeper, upon whom the gift of the puro and the apparent wealth of the new arrival had produced a favourable impression, replied, as he had done to the priest, that the only muleteers in Irun had been already engaged to transport the two ladies above stairs with their servants

to Madrid, and that though there were some other arrieros in the town, they were Maragatos, who conveyed heavy goods only, and at a slow pace. He added that there was still one person loitering about the inn, who was the master of three first-rate animals, but that his charges were so enormous that it was impossible for any one to form an engagement with him.

The smuggler seemed to prick up his ears at the character of the mules.

“And the beasts are excellent?” said he.

“Finer, your worship, never were foaled.”

“I am in haste,” said the smuggler; “I must have a talk with this extravagant mule-master of yours.”

“You have not far to seek him, for he spends three-fourths of the whole day leaning against the house at the corner of the street, and directly in front of the windows of the posada; and there,” continued he, as he advanced to the verandah, “is the very man. I wish your worship success with him; but if he keeps up his price with you as with others, there is not a fair in Spain at which you could not buy the mules for half the money.”

The traveller scarcely listened to the observation of the host, but replacing his hat, and catching up his saddle-bags, he left the room, and moved down stairs in search of the individual in the street.

The innkeeper followed him as far as the kitchen, whither he had been attracted by curiosity, to learn the amount of money expended by Jacinta, and the curé was left the solitary tenant of the apartment.

“That fellow puzzles me,” said he to himself. “What to write to the Cardinal, I know not. And then these ladies up-stairs who refuse to show themselves. And this fellow with his Gitáno look, and his mules (each handsome enough to serve the Archbishop of Toledo), who wishes to let them out for hire, and yet won’t let them. By St. Isidro, I cannot help thinking that there is something brewing under all this mystery; but for the life of me I cannot guess its shape or object, and feel as thick-headed as if for the moment I had borrowed the upper story of that booby of an innkeeper, Don Esteban.”

And Don Jeronimo placed himself in the corner of the room, and proceeded from his

ambush to watch the muleteer who had been the object of his morning speculations, and the conference, which he anticipated, was about to take place between him and the contrabandista.

CHAPTER III.

THE MULETEER.

THE traveller pursued his way down stairs. He did not, however, as the priest had anticipated, go direct into the street. With all his seeming recklessness of manner, he had apparently been taught prudence by experience, for instead of making for the great door of the inn, he stopped at the foot of the stairs, and commenced casting upon either side of him a lazy glance at the horses and mules around him.

The stable is the entrance hall of the Spanish inns. Rarely possessing food for the traveller, and exhibiting in their bare walls and dirty and unfinished apartments the most perfect

absence even of those more simple luxuries which can be found in England in the meanest alehouse, their accommodations for the four-legged visitants offer a strange contrast to those provided for their masters. The stables are always large, cool, and airy, and the chopped straw and barley, the invariable food in the Peninsula for beasts of all sorts intended for the road, abundant and of the best quality. The reason of this is simple enough. The higher classes travel little, and when they do move, have somewhat the appearance, and adopt the tactics of a small army on its march. The grandee and his family are accompanied by cooks, servants, proveditores, house-stewards, and market-men. They carry with them their provision in carts or on baggage mules. They have their wine, their hams, their sauces—while the coarser elements, such as poultry, partridges, flour, and liquor for their attendants, are purchased in any locality at which their halt may take place. Thus the innkeeper is called upon to provide them with nothing but shelter for the night, and his house degenerates into a caravanseraï. Where the chances of profit are thus extremely rare, and very grudgingly paid,

the landlord of the hostelry naturally falls back for support, and devotes his chief attention, to that class of customers which is the most numerous, and which, no small desideratum in a Spanish inn, gives the least trouble, the *arrieros* or muleteers.

The roads in Spain are for the most part execrably bad. The best which exist at the present day have been formed by the Bourbon dynasty: for the descendants of Louis XIV. with the tenacity of race inherited the building, gardening, and road-making propensity of their ancestor. Yet even under their auspices the increased facilities in the communications were limited to the highways which led from the Capital to the northern and southern boundaries of the kingdom, to Bayonne and Seville; together with some three or four shorter routes varying in length from five miles to thirty, and connecting the Palace at Madrid with the royal country residences at the Pardo, at Aranjuez, and at the Escorial. But at the time at which our story commences, Philip V., the first of the Spanish Bourbons, had been but a few years on the throne, and his troubled reign had left him neither funds nor leisure for the

improvement of what have been termed "the great arteries of commerce." The northern portion of the kingdom was thus, except by the Pampeluna road, still impassable for wheel-carriages, and the traffic of the country was in a great measure conducted through the medium of mules and their proprietors.

These were divided into two classes—those who transported merely passengers, and those who carried goods. The former, who affected a higher dignity, had mule-litters, in which the traveller was carried on his journey somewhat in the manner of a sedan-chair, making allowance, of course, for some alteration in the shape of the vehicle; for the litter was long, and capable of containing two persons in a lounging attitude. These reclined facing each other, and were borne on their way by a couple of mules placed one before and one behind, and playing their part between the shafts which connected them with the carriage, much like a couple of chairmen. Each litter was accompanied by its proprietor and his servant, both also mounted upon animals, which relieved on alternate days those which supported the litter. Some half-dozen others were attached to the

cavalcade, and carried the luggage and servants of the travellers. The mule-master himself, or the *senor caballero*, as he was termed, affected the dignity and wore the dress of a Spanish Don. Rigidly ceremonious to his employers, and claiming towards himself the same forms of politeness, with his broad-brimmed Spanish hat, his jerkin, faded cloak, and velvet breeches, peaked beard, and long rapier, he might have been mistaken for a portrait of Titian or Velasquez stepped out of its frame. But with all this, his dignity and his claim to noble blood did not prevent his having a sharp eye to his own interest; and though rigidly honest in the delivery of the property intrusted to him, animate or inanimate, he did not the less in making a bargain for its transference, insist upon the most extravagant sums which he thought it possible to extract from the haste or the wealthiness of his would-be employers.

The second and the more common class of *arrieros*, was composed of men who formed a very important part of the Spanish population. Chiefly from the neighbourhood of Astorga or the kingdom of Leon, and called by the general name of a community which seemed to have

devoted themselves to the carrying trade from generation to generation, and from father to son—the Maragatos—they held in their hands almost the whole traffic of the country. Singularly brave, and honest to the extent of a farthing, they travelled like the Arabs of the desert in caravans. Each man had his half-dozen mules, their pack-saddles laden with goods, and was himself armed to the teeth with an escopeta, or firelock, in length and appearance much like a duck-gun, and in the use of which the tribe was proverbially skilful. The excellence of their weapons, their resolution, and the numbers in which they moved, enabled them to set at defiance the numerous bands of robbers who then, as always, infested the Spanish thoroughfares. The safety thus promised to merchandize and travellers had given them a monopoly of public traffic, and not only was property almost invariably conveyed by them, but passengers who were not in a hurry, and who were disposed to tolerate their rude manners and the coarse accommodation of their resting-places, not unfrequently availed themselves of their animals and their protection.

Their importance, and the consciousness of it, had had its natural effect upon their manners. They were the lords of the road, and conducted themselves as if they knew it; for they were insolent and overbearing, and their long file of mules held the centre of the highway without turning aside for king or grandee. They formed, too, the most regular and most dearly cherished customers of the innkeeper, who in their behalf laid aside his usual indolence and indifference, and eagerly exerted himself to find favour in the eyes of a community so jealous of its rights, and so disposed to avenge as an insult offered to the body, any slight exhibited to its individual members.

There was a third class which formed a sort of hybrid between the other two; that of men not belonging to the regular guild of carriers, and who having neither the wealth of the Maragatos, nor the pretensions of the hidalgo mule-master, had become the possessors of two or three Rozinante animals, and were anxious to turn them to profitable account by letting them out for hire. But they were but little in request, partly because the characters of the men themselves were generally suspicious, and

partly because the beasts which they possessed were seldom in wind, limb, or condition, such as were calculated to tempt any travellers but those who from their poverty were willing to accept the smallness of the price charged as a compensation for the risk or the delay.

It was to this much-distrusted fraternity that belonged the muleteer, who had excited the suspicion of the priest, and whose animals had been the subject of the eulogium of Don Esteban. Possibly the remarks which had been made with regard to the extravagant price asked for their use, or possibly a desire to judge with his own eyes of excellences so vaunted, had excited the curiosity of the young traveller, for on reaching the foot of the stair, instead of making immediately his way to the door, as Don Jeronimo had expected, he stood still as we have already mentioned, and looked round him.

The stable had but one occupant, an elderly man in a shabby doublet, and a rapier by his side, the point of which trailed upon the ground, and whose length would, if necessary, have made it no bad substitute for a spit. He was leaning against the wall with his arms folded,

and looking the representation of morose dignity. But the young contrabandista knew well the talisman that opens Spanish hearts, for taking from his pouch one of those Havannahs which had excited the admiration of the curé, he advanced to him and presented it.

“Senor caballero,” said he, “will you do me the honour to accept a puro, and give me some information with regard to the best mode of reaching Aranda.”

“I kiss your hands, senor,” said the venerable Don Quixote-looking figure in reply, “and accept thankfully your magnificent present. As to the mode of travelling to Aranda, if your worship is in a hurry, that may be a matter of some difficulty. I myself should have been proud to convey so generous a cavalier, but my beasts are already engaged by two ladies and their servants, who are about to take their departure for Madrid, and the Maragatos probably travel too slowly to suit the taste of so distinguished a looking gentleman.”

“All the mules here are engaged then?”

“All, your worship—all except these,” continued he, as he lounged up the stable, pointing to three animals in the highest possible condi-

tion, and whose small heads, bright eyes, and clean limbs augured well for their spirit and capability of enduring work.

"These are fine mules, senor caballero," said the traveller, "and no doubt also are yours."

"Not amiss," said the noble muleteer, with a patronizing air, "but they do not belong to me."

"And who then may be the proprietor?"

"*Sabe Dios*—some Don Fulano, I suppose—some Mr. what d'ye call him."

"How deeply do I regret, senor, that they are not yours, that I might have hired them from you, but it may be that their owner may be disposed to let me have them."

"Possibly, your worship, but they say that he asks more than double what I, a man with a coat of arms, and a hidalgo, would have been contented with."

"What insolence!" said the traveller, with well-affected astonishment. "But I must, nevertheless, go learn his price. Can you tell me where he is to be found?"

"In the street, at the corner of the house opposite. You will know him by his zamarra. But as your worship has been generous enough

to bestow upon me this most fragrant of Havannahs, and most worthy of a king's lips, I may hint to you that he is a man without a name, and your worship recollects the old proverb 'that nobody's friend is often the traveller's enemy.' Your worship will understand me," and the speaker, by a grim smile and a nod, gave emphasis to his language.

The traveller seemed to pause for a minute as if in doubt.

"Amiable cavalier," said he, at length, "I thank you for the hint; but you, if I may judge from the purity of your language," taking off his hat in a low bow of compliment to his companion, "are a Castilian. So am I, and when did a Castilian ever know fear? I must see this man, for I am in haste;" and with the words he left the stable, and proceeded to the other side of the street.

The muleteer had not stirred from the spot which he had occupied when first seen from the window. He was a man of about five-and-thirty, of a swarthy complexion, and spare make; but, from his breadth of shoulders and length of arm, seemingly of great muscular power. His hair was jet black, his nose

slightly hooked, his lips thin ; but the feature of his face which was the most remarkable was the eye. It was not that it was either large or small, or that it possessed any peculiarity of shape or colour, but it had a fixed, staring look, and was covered, when in repose, with a thin glaze, which seemed to emit a sort of phosphoric light. He was dressed in a jacket of black sheep-skin, called a *zamarra*, ornamented with silver tags, strapped closely round the body by a leathern girdle of great breadth, and fastened in front by an iron buckle. To this was attached a pouch of untanned mole-skin, apparently intended to serve as a *cartouche-box*. On his lower limbs were breeches and leggings of brown cloth ; while a broad-brimmed hat of coarse beaver covered his head.

The traveller made a low obeisance as he approached him. It was carelessly returned, and with the air of one who was indifferent to any offer which might be made to him, and was prepared in advance to anticipate that the negotiation would be without result.

“ *Senor caballero*,” said the *contrabandista*, “ I am informed that those three handsome mules in the stable are your property.”

“ Your worship is right.”

“ I would hire them.”

“ Whither would your worship go ?”

“ I would engage them as far as Aranda del Duero ; but my affairs may possibly call me to Madrid, and I should wish to have the power, if it were necessary, to carry them along with me. What is your charge ?”

“ Two dollars a-day for each of the mules, and as much for myself, with back-fare to Irun.”

“ Two dollars a-day, and return-money besides !” said the traveller, in an accent of inexpressible astonishment. “ It is five times the amount of the sum usually asked.”

“ If your worship does not like the price,” was the reply, in a tone of the greatest indifference, “ you are the master, you need not pay it.”

“ But, *senor arriero*, consider the matter.”

“ I have considered it. Your worship is a *contrabandista*. The new laws of his Eminence the Cardinal are most severe, and if the king’s officers think fit to suspect you of having in your *alforjas* any silks which have not paid duty, they may not only chance to seize you, but to

take possession of my beasts, and I were a ruined man."

"Well, my friend, there is something in what you say; and if I were disposed to give you the price, in what time would you undertake the journey to Madrid?"

"Your worship, now that I have reconsidered the subject, I could not undertake it at all."

"*Es loco!*" muttered to himself the traveller, in astonishment.

"No, your worship, I am not mad; but the mules are all I possess, and I should go mad if a Corregidor took a fancy to them, and chose, when he arrested you, to consider them as part and portion of your worship's property."

The traveller attempted to remonstrate, but it was in vain; and he once more took his way to the door of the posada. He had half crossed the street when he heard a slight cough. He looked up, and saw in the balcony in front of one of the windows of the inn two ladies, evidently the senoras spoken of by the innkeeper as about to proceed to Madrid.

The elder, as far as could be judged, was a

woman of about fifty. She was dressed in the costume of a duenna of the period. A circular toque, or small skull-cap, of black cloth, some four inches in diameter, and rising in the centre into a peak, covered the top of her head, and formed the framework, from which was suspended a voluminous mantilla of the same material. Her upper person was compressed by a pair of stays of black silk, of great size and length, laced in front, and retained in a proper state of rigidity by long and broad busks of steel; while below was a guard-infanta, or hoop of enormous circumference, descending to her feet, and which, from its dimensions, justified the doubts of the inn-keeper whether it would be possible for her to make her way into the litter. The younger wore a small three-cornered hat, with plumes of feathers wreathed all round it; a short bodice with tight sleeves, and a skirt of the same colour and material such as that usually adopted at the time by Spanish women of rank when travelling or in the country.

Of the face of the elder dame it would be difficult to judge, except that, notwithstanding her age, her teeth were still fine, and her eyes,

while they gave evidence of past, betrayed no indisposition to present coquetry. The younger had better claims to notice. She was a beautiful girl, of about nineteen, and scarcely above the middle size. Her face and person were alike cast in the happiest mould. The forehead was lofty and intelligent; the eyebrows like a mouse's tail; the nose small and finely chiselled about the nostril. The upper lip was short and curled, and the under portion of the face indicated a consciousness of self-possession, energy, and power, which not even the modesty or the perfectly feminine beauty of the features could altogether conceal. But if there was more mind in its expression than was in consonance with that *mouton qui rêve* look which is in some countries considered the perfection of female beauty, the fault was amply redeemed by the character of the large dark eyes which, now bright and now languishing, could not, even in repose, veil the fire and joyousness of their glance.

The traveller stood still in an instant, and, doffing his beaver, bowed to the ground with the profound respect due to so beautiful a vision. The bow was the lower, perhaps, from

his having, for the moment, the vanity to suppose that the slight cough which first caught his ear had been intended for the especial purpose of attracting his notice. If he entertained such a belief, however, he was doomed speedily to be disappointed, for the eyes of the elder lady were fixed steadily on the other side of the street; while, if the laughing glance of the younger were directed towards him, it was only for an instant, and her look, like that of her companion, took the direction of the muleteer.

His ear, too, had caught the cough from the balcony, and upon him it seemed to produce a magic influence; for though he did not stir or change the lounging attitude which, with his arms folded, he had retained during the conference, he, by a side glance, watched with breathless eagerness the motions of the senoras.

They were little complimentary to the cavalier in the street; for, so far from appearing gratified by his courtesy, the younger dame, without vouchsafing any notice of his presence, whispered some words in the ear of her companion. They seemed to intimate the propriety of retreating into the interior of the apartment, for the elder immediately retired.

The girl prepared to follow her, but before she did so, looked steadily at the muleteer, and drew her right hand slowly across her mouth. In another instant she, too, had disappeared, and the immediate closing of the window intimated to the contrabandista something like displeasure at the admiration testified by his manner and the profoundness of his obeisance. The traveller would have felt inconsolable had it not been that he fancied, that, even as she withdrew, the younger fair one had glanced at him a second time, and with eyes which, ever powerful, seemed upon the present occasion to have a mockery and a meaning in their expression which were perfectly incomprehensible.

He was still standing in the street with his hat in his hand, and gazing at the closed window with somewhat of the look with which a fire-worshipper contemplates that portion of the heavens in which the sun has just set, when he was awakened from his dream of adoration by some one twitching him by the cloak. He turned round, and, to his astonishment, found that the person who wished to attract his attention was his statue-like companion of the corner of the street—the muleteer.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LADY TRAVELLERS.

THE few seconds which had elapsed seemed to have operated a wonderful change in the manners and demeanour of the muleteer. His lofty indifference to the offers made to him by the contrabandista, and the blunt and almost rude manner in which they were received had been entirely abandoned, and now with a voice almost quivering from eagerness he reopened the conference.

“I was wrong, your worship,” said he, “I have reconsidered the matter, I will accept your worship’s offer.”

The contrabandista looked at him with something like astonishment.

"I, too, sir mule-master, have also reconsidered it, and I am not disposed to renew the extravagant terms which you thought fit to reject so contemptuously."

"But what will your worship give me?" said the muleteer, eagerly. "It has since occurred to me that I may get a good back fare from Madrid, and it would suit me to accept any offer which your worship may now be disposed to make me."

"*Vaya*," said the traveller, with a smile, "suppose it were only to be the regular fare of two pesetas a-day for each mule and as much for the muleteer."

"It is a new bidding, your worship, and I take it."

The traveller looked at him with something like surprise. A shade of suspicion passed across his face as if he were doubtful of the reasons which had effected so sudden a revolution, and he fixed his keen blue eye upon his companion like one who would have read a hidden purpose. If any existed, however, there was no evidence of it in the face of the arriero. His short-lived agitation had disappeared. He had recovered his composure and

his features once more exhibited the same calmness which they had originally presented. Their expression seemed to decide the contrabandista.

“Is it then a bargain?” said he. “For two pesetas a-day for each of the mules, and as much more for yourself, am I to have the animals to Aranda del Duero, or, if I please, to Madrid?”

“Your lordship is the master. It is a bargain, and for two pesetas a-day each.”

“When will you be ready to start?”

“When your worship pleases. The beasts have been in the stable a week, and would be all the better for having their legs stretched.”

“Be ready then in an hour.”

“Your worship shall be obeyed. The mules shall be ready, and you will not regret having hired them. The senor,” continued he, with a smile, “is a contrabandista, and may not choose to have a conference with the king’s officers. If such be the case, have no fear upon that head, for there is not a nag in the Three Provinces or in Castile that will touch them in the long gallop. I’ll warrant your honour a safe arrival at Madrid.”

The words were simple, but they seemed to the traveller to contain a deeper meaning than met the ear, and again he fixed his keen eyes on his future guide, but, as before, the bronzed face told no tales, and if there were a hidden sense in the language, the expression in the countenance of the speaker gave no evidence of it.

“Pshaw!” said the young cavalier to himself. “It were losing time to speculate upon this fellow’s intentions. If I see aught like treachery, I will shoot him as I would a dog. My hand, thanks to the fates, is a pretty steady one, and come what may, his beasts deserve his boast, and there is nothing on the road likely to lay finger on my shoulder so long as I have bridle in hand and foot in stirrup.”

With these words he reiterated his instructions to his guide to have everything ready for his departure in an hour, and re-entered the *posada*.

He found the public room, as before, occupied by the priest. The innkeeper was not visible, and the curé had taken advantage of his absence to watch eagerly the scene which we have recorded, as far at least as regards the

two male actors. The ladies, as being in a room overhead, had, of course, not come within the sphere of his observation, but he had guessed even at their presence, for his quick eye had noted the profoundness of the obeisance of the young traveller, and had judged from the way in which the hat had been raised, and the expression of adoration which accompanied the courtesy, that some of the fair sex had mingled in the comedy. Still with all his quickness of perception he had been unable to guess accurately at the result, and it was therefore with a burst of honest curiosity that he welcomed the reappearance of the contrabandista.

“ Well, *senor caballero*,” said he, “ what news? Has this extravagant fellow of a muliteer consented to let you have on hire his beasts?”

“ Thanks to the Virgin he has,” was the reply, “ and in an hour I start for Tolosa.”

“ Your worship is joking.”

“ I speak the truth,” said the contrabandista: “ but I must go and see if Jacinta can get me some provisions for the road.” And with the air of one who declined further conversation, he made his way to the kitchen.

As he moved along the passage he caught a glimpse of his guide retreating down the stair. But he had scarce time to speculate upon his appearance there, for the host entered on the instant, and informed him that the two ladies, who had been for some days his guests, had instructed him to announce that, if the *senor caballero* were not engaged they were anxious to converse with him on matters of importance. Surprised as he was at the request, so gallant a cavalier had nothing for it but to obey, and intimating his acquiescence by a nod, he followed his conductor.

He found the ladies in the bedchamber, from the window of which they had shown themselves to him in the street. They stood in the centre of the apartment, while some four feet behind their respective mistresses were an old gentleman usher and an equally antique waiting-maid. The ladies curtsied to the ground as the traveller entered, while the domestics honoured his presence with an obeisance equally profound. All four then drew themselves up to their full height, and awaited with the rigidity of statues the courtesies with which the young cavalier acknowledged the po-

liteness of the senoras. He bowed first to the elderly dame, with a hat that almost swept the floor. An obeisance still lower proclaimed his devotion to the charms of the younger. A third bow addressed to the whole party, and of an equally respectful character, accompanied by *a los pies de usted*, "I throw myself at your feet, ladies," terminated the forms of politeness, which the manners of the day required; and all five, the hostesses and the visitor, regained once more their perpendicular.

"Sir cavalier," said the elderly lady, "we are informed that you are about to take your departure for Madrid."

"My movements are uncertain, senora," was the reply. "I have hired mules only to Aranda del Duero."

"It matters not, senor. It is the mountains of Guipuscoa and Alava which are dangerous. We fear them, and ere we depart for the capital, would fain secure to ourselves the protection of so gallant a cavalier."

"Senora," said the traveller, with embarrassment, "I fear that I must, however, unwillingly, refuse your request. I travel on matters of importance, and my time is not my

own. I must move at a pace which would inconvenience you and the senorita."

"We cannot," said the elderly lady, with a half smile, "allow you to escape upon such a pretext. The mules which we have secured for ourselves are able to perform the journey with speed equal to any, and we feel that our presence will not cause you delay."

The traveller hesitated as if in indecision. "Madam," said he, at length, "I fear, with what pain to myself I need not say, I must decline an office, which, at other times, would confer upon me so much honour and pleasure. Your ladyship," continued he, with a glance at his dress, "may partly suspect my profession. In the contraband trade the speculations are sometimes large and important. They are so in my case. I am sent to superintend them. In justice to my employers they must be my first object, and I must refuse you, for I am not my own master."

"You say right, senor," said the older of the two dames, repeating his words. "You are not your own master, for no man is entitled to think of the interests of his own sex when called on to obey the wishes and guard the

safety of ours. We, too, travel on matters of importance, and are anxious to gain Madrid without a moment's delay. But we learn that the Bandoleros are out in force, and dare not undertake the journey alone. We have waited in the posada, in the hope of obtaining the escort and protection of a gallant cavalier. The Virgin has sent you to our aid, and you will not desert us in our difficulty."

The young traveller played with the brim of his hat, as if uncertain what to say or do.

The elder lady remarked his hesitation. "Come," said she to her companion. "Come, Donna Teresa, add your prayers to mine. It may be that the senor will be persuaded by you not to desert us."

"I can scarce hope," said the girl, while she fixed her large liquid eyes on the traveller, with a glance that belied her words, "that any entreaties of mine will avail, when yours have failed. Yet I would say that our business is urgent, and that much depends upon our speed, and grateful should we feel, most grateful," continued she, resting strong emphasis on the words, "if he would aid us in our extremity."

The traveller continued to play with his hat.

“Senoras,” said he, at length, “be it so. I am in your hands, and will do my best to protect you. But the sacrifice is no small one, for I risk life and character by the delay.”

“Senor caballero,” said the younger lady, with a look that marked her pleasure at having gained her point, “we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. You have decided well, and it is possible we may be able to repay the obligation, and fear not that we shall delay you on the road, for our mules are excellent, and you have nothing to apprehend from our want of power of enduring the fatigue. When do you start?”

“I had proposed, ladies, moving in an hour.”

“In an hour, then, we shall be ready to attend you; and now, sir cavalier, we must for the moment bid you adieu, and commence our preparations.”

At eight o'clock in the morning, the main street of Irun presented a busy sight. In front of the posada was arranged the equipage of the travellers. There were two litters, each supported by a couple of mules, intended for the reception of the females of the cortège.

Four more were loaded with their baggage. A fifth was intended for the conveyance of their venerable major-domo. By their side was the unknown muleteer with his animals prepared for the journey; that which was to be assigned to the young traveller, being provided with an albarda or heavy-peaked saddle and broad slipper stirrups, then, as now, an inheritance from the Moors. On the third, or baggage-mule, were fastened the valise of the contrabandista, and his plaid or blanket of striped woollen, together with the spare clothing of the muleteer, and sundry hams, cheeses, and other supplies for the road, procured through the agency of the zealous Jacinta.

The party seemed well protected. The master-muleteer, and the servant attached to each litter, as well as those in charge of the baggage-mules, each carried an escopeta upon their shoulders, while the traveller himself, in addition to the *retajo*, or short blunderbuss, the invariable accompaniment of his caste, had in his waist shawl, what was more rare, a pair of double-barrelled pistols, seemingly of English manufacture.

At the appointed moment, the ladies de-

scended to the street. The duenna and her charge entered the first litter. The aged waiting-maid, with some packages of delicate female head-gear occupied the second. The traveller and gentleman usher, then took their places. The mozos rode up to the leading mules of their respective vehicles, and laid hold of the rein which was to conduct them. The impoverished Don-like figure, who was the chief of the caravan, raised himself in his stirrups to see that all was right. Everything was in its place. The innkeeper took off his hat and bowed. The hidalgo proprietor cried *arrhé!* and the whole party moved off at a pace which seemed to intimate that the pledge of the duenna would be kept, and that the speed of the young contrabandista would not be delayed by the companionship of the fair dames who had thus forced themselves upon his care.

Scarcely were they gone when the curé hurried to the window, and eagerly marked their progress, till the turn of the street hid them from his sight. His look was puzzled.

“ I must go,” muttered he to himself, “ and make up another despatch to the Cardinal ; but

I doubt if I secure my promised canonry at St. Jago by anything that I can tell him of this day's work. An Englishman, forsooth! That fellow may be the man they want, for he has fair hair and blue eyes. But if he be an Englishman, he must be in league with the devil, for he speaks Castilian as if he had never been out of sight of the Puerta del Sol, and arranges the folds of his capa with as knowing an air as any *majo* in Andalusia."

CHAPTER V.

CHARLES CLIFFORD.

THE suspicion of the priest, extravagant and incredible as it appeared even to himself, was, nevertheless, correct. The traveller was an Englishman, and the mission upon which he was engaged was precisely that which it was the wish and interest of Cardinal Alberoni to baffle.

It has been already mentioned in the introductory Chapter that it had been decided by France and England that there was little hope of giving permanent tranquillity to Europe till they had succeeded in removing the priestly prime minister of Spain.

The project was excellent ; the only difficulty was in carrying it into effect. Alberoni had for five years been the real ruler of the Spanish monarchy. From the fascination of his manners and the power of his mind he had obtained complete control over the king ; while his influence with the queen was still more unquestionable, from his being a countryman of her own, and one of the few to whom, amid the hatred borne her by her Spanish subjects, she could look for aid in the plans she had formed for the aggrandisement of her children at the expense of the heir to the crown. To attempt to offer open opposition to a man so firmly established would have been idle. It was determined, therefore, to attack him in a more unexpected fashion, by taking advantage of the weaknesses of the two royal personages on whom the Minister was dependant.

The besetting sin of Philip was bigotry—that of the queen ambition. It was hoped that influence might be obtained over the mind of the former through his spiritual director, the Jesuit D'Aubenton. Alberoni had promised a Cardinal's hat to the royal confessor. He had

not kept his word ; and it was understood that the treachery of the minister rankled in the mind of the priest. To him, therefore, letters of recommendation for the future Envoy were obtained from the General of his Order, Father Le Tournemine, at that time in Paris. As to the queen, the mode in which the allies expected to obtain her support was more simple. The Duke of Parma was her uncle. He had no children ; and as it was understood that he intended to leave his States to the offspring of his niece, he had naturally the greatest influence with his royal relative. To him were intimated the wishes of the allied powers for the fall of the Cardinal-Minister, and his aid demanded. The Duke hesitated. The result was that Austria (for that power had secretly joined the league) threatened to absorb his little sovereignty. To resist his colossal neighbour was impossible. The heir of the Farnese yielded to the menace, and wrote a letter to his niece requesting her attention to the propositions of the secret Envoy. Another was addressed by the prince to the Marquis Scotti, his ambassador at Madrid, instructing him to facilitate in every way the audience, or rather the private

interview, at which the missive to Elizabeth Farnese was to be presented. Both the precious documents were then sent to Paris, and placed at the disposition of the ambassador of England, Lord Stanhope, and Dubois, the Prime Minister of Philip Duke of Orleans, the Regent of France, and wielder of the power of that monarchy.

So far things went well. The allies had procured the tools for working the mine. What was still wanting was an agent to use them, efficiently, and on the spot. Yet to find one qualified for the post was not easy. For years had Spain been in hostility with France and England. A truce, some three months old, had no doubt for the moment arrested warlike operations; but the feeling on either side of the Pyrenees was still hostile; and any subject of the English or French crowns who might make his appearance at Madrid would, even if permitted to remain there, be so closely watched by the spies of the Cardinal, as to render his success as a political agent hopeless. To intrust the intrigue to a Spaniard was, of course, out of the question; and yet to give it any chance of a happy issue, it would be necessary

to place it in the hands of some one who could escape notice by being mistaken for an inhabitant of the Peninsula.

Such was the result of the many conversations between Lord Stanhope and the Cardinal Dubois. It was in vain that they cast their eyes upon the most distinguished diplomatists of their respective kingdoms. They were too well known to be employed secretly. What they wanted was a man who had not only talent of a high order and courage to undertake a dangerous enterprise, but an acquaintance with the Spanish language, intimate enough to enable him to assume without suspicion the character of a denizen of the country which he was about to visit. Above all, he was required to possess a person so little known to fame, as to avoid attracting the observation of the thousand lynx-eyed satellites of the private police of the Cardinal Minister, who, as a matter of course, were familiar with the appearance even of the subordinate diplomatic agents of either Government. After a long search the discovery of such a representative seemed hopeless. The matter was about to be given up in despair, when a powerful ally behind the scenes

suggested the appointment of a young man of three-and-twenty, of the name of Charles Clifford.

Clifford's father had been in his youth the secretary of the English embassy at Madrid. It was in the time of Charles II., the imbecile termination of a great race. The half-idiot sovereign had been married in the year 1678 to a daughter of France, the Princess Elizabeth. Among the maids of honour who formed part of the new Court was a Blanche de Zuniga, a daughter of the Duke of Bejar, the head of one of the most distinguished of the Spanish families. The young lady was thrown much into the society of the English secretary. A mutual attachment was formed, and they married. No opposition was offered to the match, for Clifford was the younger son of a Catholic peer, and no difference of religion, which would otherwise have formed an insurmountable barrier, opposed their union. Both, no doubt, were poor ; but in the latter part of the seventeenth century Spain was a cheap country—the income of the government official, insignificant as it would have been in St. James's-square, had a respectable appearance when

converted into Spanish currency, and the economical habits of the bride made it sufficient for their wants.

The marriage was a happy one, and its issue two sons and four daughters. The youngest of the family was Charles Clifford. He has been already introduced to our readers as the contrabandista of the inn at Irun; and it was while he was yet a child that took place the death of the last Spanish sovereign of the house of Austria. The War of the Succession followed, and brought misfortune to the allies and to Mr. Clifford. He had followed the English army as Political Agent, and with many of his countrymen, was taken prisoner at the disastrous battle of Almanza, and committed to a dungeon.

During the continuance of the struggle his wife and children had remained in the neighbourhood of Madrid, and undisturbed: partly because in a country where popular opinion was much divided, and the chances of the rival candidates equally balanced, it was considered dangerous to molest one who, in the event of the success of the house of Austria, would have such ample means of repaying the injury, and

partly from the fact that Mrs. Clifford's brother, the Duke of Béjar, had been a zealous supporter of the successful candidate for the crown, and of course enjoyed no small influence with the Princess of Ursins. Mrs. Clifford, too, had chanced to make the acquaintance and acquire the friendship of the all-powerful court favourite, and with her the sorrowing wife now interceded to alleviate her husband's captivity.

She was successful. The English official received his liberty on parole, but as the Camerera Mayor feared the jealousy of the Court and the French party, it was accompanied by an order that Mr. Clifford, with his family, should live at a distance from Madrid, and carefully conceal the kindly feeling to his wife of the Spanish female prime minister. The conditions were thankfully accepted. The Cliffords took up their residence in La Mancha, and there, supported partly by remittances from England, and partly from their Spanish connexions, they watched with interest, but without interference, the changing fortunes of the War of the Succession.

It terminated at length. By the peace of 1712 the disputed throne was conceded to the

French prince, and Mr. Clifford was free. Strange to say, he did not avail himself of his emancipation. He had been so long in Spain that he had become attached to the people and to their mode of life. The prejudices of his wife in favour of the Peninsula, were, of course, still more decided, but even her feelings yielded in intensity to those of her children. The young folks had indeed inherited the English tongue from their father, but they were Spanish in habits and associations, and always wore the dress and spoke the language of their adopted country.

Their education, notwithstanding the apparent isolation of their existence, had not been neglected, for Mr. Clifford was an accomplished man, and devoted his whole time to the instruction of his family. On occasions, too, he was able to give them more varied information than the mere theories of the schoolmaster can supply. The Princess of Ursins had forbidden their appearance at Madrid, but only during the residence of the Court. The six summer months were, according to the unvarying rule of Spanish etiquette, spent by the royal family at Aranjuez, and in their absence

the Cliffords were admitted to the capital. The boon was eagerly taken advantage of; and the young folks, under the guidance of their father, and in addition to the ordinary branches of juvenile study, acquired a knowledge of architecture, painting, and sculpture, in a city which at the time possessed finer specimens of the arts than any other upon earth. Such was the mode in which were consumed their more serious hours. Their leisure moments were employed by the two young men in that, to youth, most interesting of occupations, exploring the streets and mixing with the population of a great town, and not unfrequently, in the whim of the moment, assuming the dress and affecting the manners of its motley-coloured inhabitants. Three summers had thus been spent, and at their close Charles Clifford and his brother were as well acquainted with every lane of the Spanish metropolis as any loungeur of the Puerta del Sol.

It was at this time, when the youngest son was about nineteen, that an accident occurred which changed the residence of the family. Mr. Clifford's father, and, shortly afterwards, his elder brother died. He became thus the inheritor

of the family honours. He returned to England, and thither accompanied him the Manola nurse of his children, and her brother, the major-domo of his limited household.

With his new rank arose new prospects for his children. Lord Clifford's family was ancient. Though poor, its influence was considerable, and the new peer, from his captivity in Spain, had a claim upon the Minister. For his eldest son, the heir to the peerage, no profession was required, and Lord Clifford devoted all his interest to the advancement of the younger. Charles Clifford got a commission in the Life-Guards. In these days commissions were easily bestowed, and promotion rapid, when rank and interest backed the candidate. At three and twenty the young man was a lieutenant-colonel. Still he was little separated from his family. Lord Clifford lived in London, where Spanish, from old habit, was the language of the young people, who still continued to amuse themselves in moments of gaiety by masking themselves in the Spanish dress, and delighting the ears of their nurse and their aged servitor by the purest Castilian.

It was at this time that Clifford unexpectedly

received an order from the Commander-in-Chief to doff his uniform and proceed immediately to Paris. No reasons were assigned to him for his sudden journey, nor was he permitted to give any further information to his family than that the king required his services elsewhere than in London. In other respects the orders given him were definite enough. He was instructed to call himself Jones, to proceed to a certain house in a certain street in the French metropolis, where he was to hold himself secluded, not only from his countrymen in Paris, but from the British Embassy.

He obeyed. On the third night after his arrival, a carriage was heard to stop in the street below, and two individuals wrapped in large mantles entered the room. The cloaks were thrown aside, and in one of his unexpected guests, the young life-guardsman, recognized Lord Stanhope. The other was announced to him as the Cardinal Dubois, the Prime Minister of France, and of the Regent Orleans.

The young officer underwent a rigorous examination. His acquaintance with history, with politics, with Madrid, with the Spanish

and French languages, were all carefully canvassed in turn. For the most part the questions were put by his countryman, while the French Minister confined himself in a great measure to fixing on him his keen cat-like glance, and noting with the quickness of thought his answers, his manner, his look, his person.

The examination was long, but was apparently satisfactory. When it was over, the two diplomats retired to a corner of the room.

“Well, your Eminence,” said the English Minister, “what do you think of our young goshawk. Will it be safe to fly him.”

“It will. The fellow has a head upon his shoulders. Besides, he is as cool as a cucumber, and I should think with pluck enough to take the devil by the throat, and I know,” said the dissolute priest, with one of his usual leers, “if I were his Satanic Majesty, I should be right sorry to stand the tussle. And then he has the diplomatic accomplishments. His French might do for a member of the Academy. What say you to his Spanish? for if I recollect,” said he, with a side laugh, and a nudge of the elbow, “the Duke of Vendôme at Villa

Viciosa gave you an opportunity of becoming a judge of the language."

"Your Eminence is cruel," said Stanhope, in reply, "to allude to my little misfortune; but I did my best to profit by it, and I flatter myself I am a judge of the Spanish. That young fellow," continued he, pointing over his shoulder at Clifford, "can patter Castilian as well as if he had never stirred beyond the mud walls of that the most melancholy and unsupper-giving of capitals."

"Ah for *bon vivants*, like your lordship, I can conceive no residence more dreadful than a country, where, as the old proverb goes, you will find a thousand priests, and not one cook. Certes! if you ever have hesitated about forgiving Vendôme for your captivity, his shutting you up in a place where that horrid mess Gazpacho is considered a delicacy, would be sufficient to excuse your vindictiveness. But to business. I think the fellow will do. However, before we decide, a friend of ours, who shall be nameless, must see him."

"It would, methinks, be time lost, and worse than lost."

"Faith, my lord, we can't help ourselves.

The old jade will have a finger in every dish. I know her well, and if we do not allow her to help in the making, she is sure to spoil the pudding, and she insists upon seeing the fellow."

"Well, if it must be so, it must; but between ourselves, what with the Duchess of Kendal in England, and Madame Parabere here, I had rather that the petticoats kept themselves to their own vocation."

"Pooh, pooh, my lord, you are too hard upon the sex. Politics would go on ill without them. At least, so says the Regent; though I confess that he generally chooses his Egerias some forty years younger than the ancient Jezebel, who has thought fit to thrust herself upon our counsels."

"Get quit of her then."

"Impossible—I dare not risk it. She is a perfect devil incarnate if thwarted, and she will mar if she can't make."

"What does your Eminence propose then?"

"She must see him to-morrow night; and, as it might excite suspicion if the Minister of France and the Ambassador of England were often together, I will not ask the favour of your

lordship's company, but will conduct him myself."

"So be it then."

The above conversation had been unheard by Clifford. All that transpired from it was the result. The young soldier was ordered to hold himself in readiness the following night at ten o'clock. At that hour the Cardinal Dubois entered his room, enveloped as before in a cloak, and bearing another of a precisely similar description upon his arm. In this Clifford was instructed to wrap himself, and the two, as soon as the disguise had been put on, descended to the street. A plain dark carriage, with coachman, but without lacqueys, awaited them. As soon as they had entered it, it started at a rapid pace, and after half an hour's locomotion, stopped in front of a shabby house in a gloomy and dirty street. Here Dubois descended, ordering Clifford to follow him. The Cardinal opened the door by a key he produced from his pocket, and closing it carefully after the admission of himself and companion, proceeded up stairs. A second key gave them admission into apartments upon the third floor, which were at the back of the building, and probably looked

upon a garden. The second portal was closed as carefully as the first, and the parties moving across a narrow lobby, found themselves in a room at the farther end of it. It was of no great size, plainly furnished, but lavishly provided with wax tapers. At one side, and leading into an adjoining chamber, was another door. It was open, and the space which it had left vacant was covered nearly to the top with an Indian screen. The room beyond, however, was in total darkness.

The Cardinal placed the young soldier in the centre of the principal apartment, where the lights brought his person into strong relief; and with instructions to him not to move, went out. Shortly after, there was a whispering heard behind the screen, and Clifford thought he could distinguish the tones of a woman's voice. Dubois then returned, and proceeded to put the young soldier through what appeared somewhat like a military drill. He made him face the screen, then turn to it first one profile, then another. Then followed instructions to him to sit down, to rise up, to walk, to take his hat off, to put his hat on. The conversation during all this time had been

carried on in French, when a white handkerchief was thrown over the top of the screen. It was apparently a signal, for the Cardinal immediately ordered Clifford to answer his questions in Spanish. After awhile, a black handkerchief replaced the white one. It terminated the strange interview.

The Cardinal immediately retired, taking his young companion with him, and returned to Clifford's lodgings. On the following day, Lord Stanhope and Dubois entered his chamber, and informed him that he had been selected to overturn Alberoni's ministry. He was impressed with the necessity of preserving his incognito, and permitted to select the costume which he thought best calculated for that purpose. He fixed upon the disguise with which he was most familiar—that of the Andalusian Majo, or coxcomb, the favourite garb of the Spanish smugglers, and worn by the more foppish of the population of all ranks when on a freak. He was informed that he would find such a dress in a small house in St. Jean de Luz, where he was ordered to pass the night before entering Spain. He was further instructed, on gaining Madrid, to make his way to the Calle

de la Cabeza, a retired street in the centre of the city, where was resident a dependant of the English Government, and where he would find not only safe quarters, but trusty subordinates, and every variety of costume, should prudence, or necessity, make a change of dress necessary. Full instructions were then given to him for his political conduct, together with bills on England signed by Lord Stanhope for fifty thousand crowns. Letters of credence were added, together with the various packets intended for the Queen, D'Aubenton, and Scotti. All was now ready, and four days afterwards (for apparently some delay had occurred in the interval) he started on his journey. He arrived safely at St. Jean de Luz, found the promised dress with the arms which usually accompanied it, waiting for him, and, as our readers are aware, entered as a contrabandista the posada at Irun.

With this explanation we resume our story.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JOURNEY.

AFTER leaving Irun the litters and their attendants proceeded at a rapid pace. Indeed, though the road was little calculated for wheel-carriages, its inequalities seemed in no degree to affect the sure-footed mules, which moved on with a speed that could not have been anticipated by those who, for the first time, saw the clumsy conveyances they carried on their backs.

Behind, and at some distance, came Clifford and his guide.

“Well,” muttered he to himself, “if this pace holds I shall have nothing to regret in having

become a squire of dames. And yet considering the mission on which I am employed, it was folly, and worse than folly, to have encumbered myself with these two women. I wonder what their names are, or who is this mysterious guide of mine, with a face between a Jew and a gipsy's, who refuses crowns and takes pesetas."

With the words he summoned his attendant to his side.

"Senor caballero," said Clifford, "by what name have I the honour to address you?"

"Perez, your worship."

"And how do you generally employ yourself?"

"I am but commencing life, your worship, and having saved some money, I bought these mules, and have started as an arriero."

"And how long, senor caballero, have you followed the trade?"

"This is my fourth journey."

"You know the road then well to Madrid?"

"Every inch of it."

"And do you think there is any reason for the fears expressed by the ladies in the litter?"

"As to what, your worship?"

“ As to the robbers on the road.”

“ Why, as to that, *senor*, the general report goes that the *bandoleros* are out in force. It is scarce three months since the war was over, and as there are not a few disbanded soldiers, it is likely enough they have taken to levying contributions on their own account, and we shall scarce reach Madrid without meeting them. Your worship as a *contrabandista* is no doubt well able to handle the *retajo*, and ere long you may be called on to prove your skill.”

“ And you, what can you do in such an emergency?”

“ I,” said the guide, putting his finger upon a long gun, which hung suspended by his side, and was generally known by the name of an *escopeta*, “ I handle this not amiss.

“ And what are we to expect from the escort of the *senoras*?”

“ Just nothing, your worship. As for the *mozos* or mule lads, they make it a rule never to resist, and as to that old fool in the rusty velvet doublet and long sword, who says his blood is as blue as any in Castile, he will talk big till the moment comes; but as soon as the

bandoleros call out their usual '*boca à tierra*,' you will see his worship's nose as deep in the dust as ever yet was that of any man who fell into the hands of the gentlemen of the road."

"Pleasant intelligence this," said Clifford to himself, as he pushed ahead of his companion. "So it seems we are to have a skirmish, and I, as if I had not sufficiently important business on my shoulders, must needs encumber myself with the protection of a party that can neither fight nor fly. Ah! Charles Clifford, Charles Clifford—if Lord Stanhope and Dubois could have guessed that you were so easily led astray by a pair of bright eyes, they never would have sent you on a special mission to Madrid."

His regrets were interrupted. The cavalcade in front had reached the foot of the hill which leads to Ernani, and the mules necessarily relaxed their pace. The elder of the ladies seemed disposed to take advantage of the opportunity of increasing her acquaintance with the young man she had pressed into her service, for as the litter slowly wound its way up the steep ascent, the large toque was seen to project from its side, and the bright-eyed duenna, with her handkerchief, intimated to Clifford

her wish to address him. The young soldier had nothing for it but to comply, and touching his mule with the spur, the spirited animal soon placed him by the side of the litter.

“ Senor contrabandista,” said the duenna, in a voice, which, notwithstanding the fifty years of the owner, sounded melodious in the ears of the young Englishman, “ I trust you see that we are about to keep our word, and that, however anxious you may be to reach Madrid, we are little likely to detain you on your journey. And now, senor, you will allow me to explain to you the reasons for our anxiety to reach the capital without delay. The grandfather of my charge is a rich burgess of Madrid, and is ill, and he has sent for his grandchild to see her before he dies. With the old man’s name I will not acquaint you. The senor is aware that sometimes, for family reasons, these are matters which it is necessary to conceal. Upon such subjects, therefore, your worship will be too discreet to ask questions, but I may mention, that my child has been for some time resident at Paris, though in the strictest seclusion, and as the senor has been gallant enough to grant two poor women his protection, I will allow

her to converse with so accomplished a cavalier, for no doubt a gentleman, in the profession of a contrabandista, is well acquainted with matters on both sides the Pyrenees.”

To this discourse Clifford gave but little attention. The curtains of the litter had been drawn back, and during the oration of the duenna, his eyes had been fixed upon her companion. The young lady had none of the awkwardness of a girl who had just issued from a convent. On the contrary, there was, in her manner, expression, and movement, the self-possession of one who had mixed much and often in society. This, in itself, was little remarkable, and might not have attracted, on the part of the traveller, more than passing observation. But what did strike him as extraordinary was, that in the glance of the bright eyes, which from time to time met his, and in the smile of the beautiful mouth, there was an expression of meaning and intelligence which evidently spoke larger acquaintance with the world than the professions of the duenna would have led him to suppose. There was evidently a mystery—what it was puzzled him. Sometimes the distinguished manners of both

ladies (and no one was better able than Clifford, familiar as he was with the best society, to note them) led him to believe that they belonged to a class very different from that which they professed. Sometimes his suspicions were even more extravagant. It seemed to him, occasionally, that if he had not been able to read the disguise of his companions, the younger dame at least had been more fortunate in solving his. For when the better to play his assumed character he adopted the phraseology of his class, or detailed at length his purchases and his profits, he was met by an expression of saucy incredulity which excited in his mind the strongest doubts as to his having efficiently supported his incognito. The thought of having been discovered, to the last degree irritated him.

“Pshaw!” said he; “a diplomatist, indeed, when I am puzzled at the commencement of my new career by an old woman and a silly girl. I must find out who they are; I must discover if they suspect that I am anything but a contrabandista.”

The resolution was an excellent one, but he was not the more successful in carrying it into

effect. And yet it was from no want of opportunity. The old dame seemed to use her duenna authority with little severity, or, to speak more correctly, appeared to give every encouragement to the intercourse between her ward and the young soldier. On the level ground, indeed, the travellers proceeded at a pace which rendered conversation impossible; but there were, nevertheless, many opportunities of carrying it on. The road from Irun to Vittoria is, to the last degree, undulating. It crosses for many a long mile the broken country which forms the provinces of Alava and Guipuscoa; and as the narrow highway wound up or down the steep mountain ranges, the slow pace of the litter enabled Clifford to attach himself to its side, and to hold long and undisturbed conversation with its fair inmate.

Besides which, other occasions were not wanting. At night, indeed, when arrived at the inn which was to form their resting-place, the ladies at once retired to their bed-rooms, as, for the most part, the only public apartment was the kitchen, common alike to beggar and grandee; and where the coarseness of the jokes and language rendered the presence of women

of the higher classes impossible. But during their forenoon halt the travellers possessed greater independence. They then, for the most part, notwithstanding the late period of the year, adopted the pic-nic system, so general in the Peninsula, and of which such delicious reminiscences exist in the pages of "Gil Blas." The travellers would halt by the side of a mountain stream, or under the shade of some gigantic oak or chestnut. There for two or three hours the mules would be picqueted, with their nose-bags attached, well filled with barley—a fire lighted—partridges, or hares, or other cold roast game, produced by the venerable usher—and, with the aid of a bota, or leathern bottle, of excellent wine, and a loaf of bread, the repast proceeded gaily. The elder of the ladies would then fold her arms, and, reclining against a tree, appear to slumber, while Clifford, stretched at the feet of the younger, passed in gossip the happy hours.

His conversational talents were great; nevertheless, he did not elicit the information he expected. Yet, in one respect, he had been successful; for it was evident that he was winning his way to favour. In the first

instance the ladies had been assisted to their litter by their aged attendant; Clifford was now permitted to supply his place. Nor was this all. According to the rigid rules of Spanish etiquette, it was then strictly forbidden to touch a lady's hand, and the life-guardsmen, when he was first allowed to aid his fair companions to their vehicle, had, the better to support his assumed character, conformed to the conventional rules of his adopted country, and carefully covered his wrist with his cloak; and upon that the ladies leant themselves as they mounted to their seat. Even this ceremony had in time been dispensed with. He was permitted to exercise his gallantries after the French fashion, and touch, as he placed her in her carriage, the young girl's fair fingers. Such a matter might have appeared trifling in England, but in Spain at least it was proof that the intimacy was proceeding at a rapid rate.

The very subjects, too, with which the young folks were mutually conversant formed an additional attraction. When people use the term "society," they mean, for the most part, a larger or smaller number of human

beings placed in contiguity. Yet nothing less correctly represents the idea. For society something more is required than mere association. It means neither the banding together of old with old, or young with young, or even rich with rich, and poor with poor. A similarity of age may do something—a similarity of class may do more; but what is essential beyond these two ingredients is a character not merely of education but of mind, which induces to look through the same medium upon the same objects, and causes hearts to respond from a common touch to the same sympathies. And it was this community of feeling which had so rapidly formed the bond between Clifford and his fair fellow-traveller. Both were young—both were light-hearted—both, as each soon discovered, were well-informed, and had seen much of what, in common parlance, is called “the World.”

It was in vain, as we have already mentioned, that the young soldier, ever and anon, recollected the part he had to play, and fell back upon the affected tastes and ignorance of a contrabandista's life. It was in vain that he

paraded his topographical knowledge of Mechlin and Paris, gravely adding a list of the monies paid for lace at the one place and jewellery at the other ; a subject in which he was, in fact, a proficient, as he had passed the four days that had preceded his departure from Paris in preparing himself for his new profession by studying “a price-current” furnished him on purpose by the Cardinal Dubois. The laughing eyes and fascinating manners of his companion speedily made him forget his assumed caution, and he found himself recurring to courts and camps, and high solemnities, which, if his acquaintance with persons and ceremonials were derived, as he averred, solely from the descriptions of others, proved him to be a contrabandista of a most happy memory.

The young lady was equally fortunate in her reminiscences. Her duenna, in the few words addressed to Clifford at Ernani, had sketched her ward’s position. From time to time she herself had vouchsafed to add to the information. Her father and mother were both dead. The former had been an officer in the army, and a Spaniard ; the latter was a Parisian. From

her daughter had acquired a knowledge of the language of France, and she had now been for a year on a visit to her relatives in that country. The designation of her father's family, *Mademoiselle de Chalais*—for so she called herself—never mentioned, and Clifford was too polite to inquire what it was obviously intended he should not know. It was probably of the middle class, for she spoke of her grandfather, and with pride, as having been a burgomaster. As to her French connexions, they apparently pretended to noble blood, from the prefix of the *De* attached to her name. But a similar claim to rank was made by thousands of families in France, and, of itself, it went for little. One thing, notwithstanding the number of her present attendants, seemed more certain: they could not be in affluent circumstances, for it had escaped the young lady, upon several occasions, that her home in Paris had been in the *Marais*, one of the oldest, dirtiest, and least eligible parts of the French capital, and a residence in which could only have been dictated by a necessity for the most rigid economy.

If his suspicions as to her poverty were real, and the locality of her residence, little aristocratic as it was, truly stated, it was astonishing how extensive the young lady's knowledges were. She appeared to have as extraordinary a memory as her companion. From her position she could not, of course, have seen them; yet who could sketch off better the bloated face of the Duke of Orleans? or the beautiful eyes and graceful manners of the boy-king? or the black-browed, sarcastic countenance of the Duke of St. Simon? or the alabaster-like skin of Mademoiselle de Charolais? or the vixenish expression of the Duchess of Maine? She knew everything; from the colour of the hangings of the *Ceil de Bœuf* at Versailles to the last new fashion of dressing the hair, invented by Madame de Souza.

With such a disposition to gossip, and such wonderful powers of memory on both sides, it may easily be supposed that the hours passed rapidly. During the first day the conversation had been held in Spanish, but this was changed, according to the commands of the whimsical young lady, and she instructed her

companion to address her for the future in French. How far the desire to carry on her flirtation without the knowledge of her duenna, who did not understand a word of it, had anything to do with this determination, is a matter which we will leave to our fair readers to decide.

“ We are south of the Pyrenees, *senor contrabandista*,” said she ; “ but I have been of late in France, and it is my wish that, for the future, French should be our only language. There is but one thing worth admiring on this side of the mountains, and that is the pretty fashion in which they address each other. I detest being called *Mademoiselle de Chalais*. Here I am *Donna Teresa* ; so I pray of you, when you speak to me, not to forget giving me my proper appellation. It is a pretty one—is it not ? There now !—you need not say so many fine things on the subject. I was sure you would like it ! and as for you, I am tired of saying *senor contrabandista*. Do you not chance to have godfathers and godmothers, and a Christian name, like other folks ? Ah, *Carlos* ! They call you *Carlos*, do they ?

Well, that's not amiss for a man in your horrid trade. However, in this country, every body is noble, from the beggar to the king; only the former, for the most part, holds himself to be the better man of the two. I do not see why you should not be as noble as the rest. So you shall be Don Carlos, and I will be Donna Teresa."

The young soldier made no objection to the honours thus thrust upon him, and the new appellations were adopted without further discussion. They seemed to add a fresh link to the rapidly increasing intimacy; and sometimes by the side of the litter, and sometimes stretched under a chestnut-tree, the conversations went on with little intermission. Only a few days had been passed on the road, and they already seemed to have known each other for a life-time. A snug corner in a drawing-room may be no bad place for a *tête-à-tête*, but for bringing young love rapidly to maturity there is nothing like the greenwood. The turfy dell and the leafy grove were the favourite haunts of nymphs and swains of old. It was there "the goddesses came down to

men;" and there, stretched upon the grass during the time of their mid-day halts, while listening to the soft, melodious voice of his companion, and basking in the sunshine of her smiles, did Clifford, following the example of the Golden Age, worship his divinity.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VENTA.

IN the meantime the travellers proceeded rapidly on their journey. The promise made by the duenna, that the mules which formed her train and that of her young companion, should keep pace with the higher-bred animals of the contrabandista, had as yet been verified by the result; at least no delay had taken place from any fault of the beasts themselves. The shaft, however, of one of the litters had broken, and getting it repaired detained them six hours at Aranda.

This city stands on the southern margin of the great plain watered by the Douro, and near

the base of the Somo Sierra,—the lofty range which divides Old from New Castile. It had been the intention of the wayfarers to have left it before daybreak, so as to have reached the same evening the town of Buitrago, on the southern slopes of the mountain. But the time expended in mending the litter had disappointed these calculations, and delayed the start so long that it had become a matter of doubt how far they should not postpone their departure till the following day. But the young soldier was eager to press forward, and the ladies, unwilling probably from delicacy to retard his progress, after having, in some degree, thrust themselves upon his care, agreed, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, to resume their route—an arrangement which seemed well calculated for the comfort of their four-footed companions, as from Aranda to Buitrago was a distance of fifteen leagues,—rather too fatiguing an undertaking for a single day's journey.

It was decided, in consequence, when the move had been determined on, to make a short afternoon stage, and halt for the night at a small solitary inn of the name of “La Juanilla,”

about four leagues distant, and situated among the lower ranges of the Somo Sierra.

At about three in the afternoon accordingly the party left Aranda and the extensive plains, which for some days past they had been traversing, and commenced the ascent of the mountain. For three weary hours did they toil up its side. The distance was not great, but the mules, nevertheless, began to show symptoms of fatigue, and to add to their annoyances, the sun had set shortly after they had left the level country. It was, therefore, with more than ordinary pleasure that Donna Teresa learned from her attendant muleteer that they were at no great distance from their quarters for the night, and with girlish joyousness she summoned Clifford to her side, and communicated to him the agreeable intelligence.

“Know you aught of this ‘La Juanilla,’ Perez?” said the young cavalier to his attendant, as he fell back, and once more took his place by his side.

“But too much, senor,” was the reply. “The venta has an evil reputation. It is said to be the resort of half the smugglers and rogues in Castile.”

“Come, Perez,” said Clifford, laughing; “you forget that I am a contrabandista. You should not be so hard upon the fraternity.”

“A thousand pardons, caballero. I meant not to include among those I spoke of an honourable senor like yourself, who makes happy the Castiles with silks and tobacco without troubling the Customs. But it is said that the venta is the head-quarters of a band of robbers who sweep the whole of this side of the Somo Sierra. May the foul fiend take them!” And the usually apathetic Perez exhibited an agitation so extraordinary that it attracted the attention of his companion.

“You speak as if you knew them personally,” said Clifford.

“Something I do of one of their brood. The curse of the plagues of Egypt be on him! But it matters not,” continued Perez, muttering to himself; “it matters not; his hour, too, may come;” and with the words, his fingers unconsciously found their way to his girdle, and clasped the handle of a large knife which, as usual, formed a portion of the dress of men of his class.

“You anticipate danger, then?” said Clifford.

“ I do.”

“ Why, in God’s name, then, when that pompous fool of a muleteer who is in attendance on the senoras proposed stopping there for the night, did you not suggest another locality?”

“ And where was one to be found, caballero? There is not another venta within ten leagues.”

“ Yet still to allow a young lady, and I warrant a noble one, to run into the lion’s den was not the part of a Spaniard or an hidalgo.”

“ What matters the senorita to me,” said his guide, in a sulky tone. “ I have contracted with your worship to convey you to Madrid safe and sound. I go not beyond my own party.”

“ But you ought to have remembered, you scoundrel, that I, as a caballero, am in honour bound to protect Donna Teresa, and you for the time, as my servant, to give effect to my wishes.”

“ If your worship is disposed,” said Perez, with a sneer, “ to act the part of Don Quixote, as I think they call him, for I have heard gentlefolks speak of some such fool that went about succouring distressed damsels, you are

likely, ere long, to have an opportunity of gratifying your fighting propensities. But there is no danger for the *senoritas* to-night. It is not in a house where there are some twenty *arrieros*, each with a good *escopeta* by his side, that any attempt will be made on their purses."

"And where, if such villany be intended, will it be carried out?"

"Why on the highway of our lord and master Don Philip," said the man, with a laugh.

"And when?"

"To-morrow, or it may be the day after; for in two days more we shall have cleared the Sierra, and we get amongst good men and true, when we have once turned our backs upon its forests."

The conversation dropped, and Clifford let the reins fall on the neck of his mule, as the animal, at a slow pace, began to mount one of the steep ascents of the great mountain range, which even through the darkness of the night loomed forth boldly.

In truth, the speculations of the envoy of

Lord Stanhope were not agreeable. The mere danger did not affect him. On the contrary, there was something in his temperament that made its approach welcome, from the pleasure afforded by the excitement. But he could not altogether reconcile himself to the line of conduct he had adopted. He had been intrusted with a commission of the highest importance. Its success depended upon his immediate arrival at Madrid; and the position of the ministry at home, nay, the very safety of the crown of the house of Hanover might be compromised by its failure, and yet, with the knowledge of all this, he had allowed himself to be seduced by a pair of black eyes into becoming the protector of one with whose very name he was scarce acquainted. And his folly was likely to bear its fruits. With the splendid animals which belonged to himself—well armed—and with little to induce an attack, it would have been hardly possible to have arrested his progress; but now with two helpless women in his charge, with their cavalcade of litters, and pack-horses, and useless attendants, it would be no difficult task for two or three resolute

men to stop, or at least delay, a party alike unprovided for defence or escape. Bitter as were his regrets, he was conscious that they came too late. From the half-muttered hints of his guide, he felt that danger was near, and it was impossible to leave his fair charge exposed to its influence, without making an effort to save her. With this thought, he put spurs to his mule, and rejoined the party in front.

In the meantime, the road became more and more broken, alternately ascending and descending the steep low hills which formed the sides of the cordillera.

At length, after travelling some half league further, a light was seen in the distance; as they advanced towards it, sounds of music and laughter came upon the ear, till at last, upon closer approach, the travellers found themselves in the neighbourhood of a long low building, which, even through the darkness of the night, appeared in a state of disrepair.

The arrival of the party, considerable as it was, seemed scarcely to excite notice. Elsewhere, host and hostess bustle to the door,

servants of all classes muster round the new comers, and everything exhibits that eager welcome which poor Shenstone used to declare was only to be found in an inn. But in Spain—true to their Arab descent—the pride and the poverty of the people serve alike to smother the existence of the feeling, and to prevent its display. Sometimes the proprietor of the establishment, or his better half, may lounge to the door under the influence of their curiosity, but when arrived there, either party stand as unconcerned and as listless as if there were no duties to discharge in providing for the wants of the travellers, and nothing to gain by their expenditure.

The venta of La Juanilla was no exception to the general rule. The landlord, indeed, and some muleteers, had carelessly moved to the outside on first hearing the sound of the mules, but returned to the interior as soon as they had ascertained the number and appearance of the coming guests, without having exhibited, in either case, the slightest wish to assist them. Left thus to his own exertions, Clifford presented himself at the side of The-

rese's litter, and having aided her and her companion to alight, conducted them within the doorway, and demanded quarters.

The landlady, dirty and yet tawdry in her dress, received, with undisguised ill humour, an application for apartments, which, though to be extravagantly paid for, nevertheless occasioned some trouble in their preparation. However, with the manner of one submitting to an overwhelming necessity, she led the way, grumbling all the while at the airs given themselves by people of quality, more especially by those of the softer sex, who she declared, in half-muttered sentences, were unfit for any purpose upon earth but standing in a balcony and listening to a serenade.

On gaining the upper story, the two ladies and their waiting-woman were ushered into their apartment. It was a small room, about ten feet square, without either window or furniture. The want of the former gave a close stifling character to its atmosphere, while the latter was supplied from a store closet which contained the sum total of the moveables of the establishment. From this were taken three

mattresses. These were placed on the floor, pillows and some dirty blanketing were added, and the hostess, having presented her fair guests with the key, departed with the air of one who had amply discharged all the duties of her vocation.

Therese was too well acquainted with the manners of her country to feel or express surprise at the scantiness of the accommodations ; nor, in fact, was she much affected by their absence. The Spanish higher classes, like those in the East, look upon their inns as nothing better than caravanserais—buildings offering protection, indeed, from the weather, and supplying the coarser necessities of life, but nothing beyond them. She was accordingly provided with luxuries of her own ; and from one of the pack mules her attendant now produced the clothing necessary for the night, as well as some wine and cakes to allay hunger, till a more substantial meal was prepared.

Clifford, as soon as his fair companions had been provided for, descended to the kitchen. It was large, and had its ceiling supported by two or three roughly-squared beams, which

served as pillars. The walls were coarsely plastered, and daubed with whitewash; yet even they had their ornaments. Here and there hung four or five highly-coloured, but ill-executed, prints of Saints, in frames, which appeared to have been once gilt; while a stucco figure of the Virgin, painted in the universal blue mantle and glory round her head, occupied a niche at the end of the room; a small lamp burned below. Opposite was an enormous fire-place, and upon and around it were a cauldron and divers pipkins, apparently, from the steam which ascended from them, well filled.

In the centre of the spacious apartment a muleteer was dancing the fandango with the daughter of the host, the brightness of whose eyes and graceful motion tempted the spectator to forget the dirtiness of her velvet jerkin and the disorder of her unbrushed hair. The damsel gave point to her coquetry by using castanets; while a muleteer reclined on the floor, and, adopting what he considered a graceful attitude, acted as the Orpheus of the dancers, by playing on the guitar. Some ten or twelve men lay on the ground, wrapped in their large

brown mantles, and each having the universal cigarito in his mouth ; while through the door which opened into the stable might be seen some half-dozen more arrieros, who had probably finished their supper, and were now fast asleep in the stalls tenanted by their animals.

Near the fire-place, and sitting aloof from the rest, were three men, to judge from their appearance, of a higher rank than the general occupants of the venta. Two had little about them to attract attention. The third was about five and thirty, and apparently, by birth, an Andalusian ; for, even amid the wreck occasioned by unbridled passions, he had still remaining much of the classic beauty of the province where the Arabs longest reigned and last lingered.

In this group the arrival of the party seemed to produce a much stronger feeling of curiosity than in the other guests, for all three hurried forth, and, under the shadow of a horse-stall, surveyed the new comers. The espial occupied not a moment, and scarcely had Donna Teresa been aided from her litter, when they once more took their places by the side of the

kitchen fire, and resumed that attitude of quiet indifference which is felt or affected by the inhabitants of the Peninsula.

It was only upon Clifford's entering the room that they threw off their apathy. Without affecting to observe him, they, nevertheless, carefully and minutely studied his appearance. The investigation, though keen, did not last more than a second. It seemed, however, to suggest an idea, for the youngest of the three, the Andalusian, looked interrogatively at his comrades. The glance was replied to in both by a slight motion of the head; and the dark-eyed cavalier turned with a graceful courtesy towards the young soldier.

He, too, on his part, had not been idle. Naturally shrewd, bold, and quick-witted, the varied life he had led had done much to sharpen his natural intelligence, and the conclusions he arrived at were generally most accurate with regard to those with whom he was brought into contact. Upon the present occasion, prepared by the hints of Perez to expect some more than ordinary dangers in the occupants of the venta, he, on entering the public room,

looked eagerly round him. The dozen muleteers, stretched on the ground, gave no cause for suspicion ; and his eyes were at once riveted on the occupants of the fire-place.

“ Ha ! ” said he to himself, “ faded velvet, broken plumes, shabby finery, and that devil-may-care look, which speaks acquaintance with the wine-shop and the dice-box. These are no doubt the gentlemen of whom Perez was speaking. Clerks of St. Nicholas, every one of them ! ” But there was nothing in the well-trained manner or glance that betrayed suspicion ; and it was with a bland smile and a profound obeisance that he replied to the courtesy of the Andalusian.

“ Welcome, *senor caballero*,” said the latter. “ A cold night for a journey. Will your worship approach the fire ? ” And, suiting the action to the word, he drew back his chair, and made way for the new-comer, who advanced and expanded his hands before the blaze with affected eagerness.

“ The *caballero* came by the north road,” continued the Andalusian. “ He is no doubt from Aranda del Douro.”

“Your worship is right,” said Clifford, with a smile.

“It is a lonely track, and not agreeable for late travelling,” continued the Andalusian.

“Both,” said Clifford, laughing, “suit gentlemen of my profession well enough. Silks and cigars,” continued he, with a meaning glance at his three companions, “travel best by night.”

“Ho! ho! ho!” replied the Spaniard, “especially when they pay nothing to the king’s exchequer! Your worship is a contrabandista. I knew it,” continued he, as Clifford removed his large mantle from his shoulders—and displayed the dress beneath it. “Had the cloak been off before, I had not asked the question. None,” he muttered, as with something like a sigh, he surveyed the rich clothing, “none can deck himself out so veritable a *majo*, but a grandee of Spain or a contrabandista.”

“Trade is not amiss,” said the seeming smuggler, with a simper, and in the accent of affected humility.

“Not amiss! By the Virgin it is a fortune in itself—if a man get some trusty fellows

about him and can depend on them. Is your worship well attended?"

"I know where to find men when I need them," said his companion, with a smile; "but I carry the best friends about me." And, with the words, he pushed back his jacket, and while he held out carelessly a short double-barrelled rifle in his right hand, showed a heavy pair of pistols in his sash.

"Oh, the Virgin!—ho, by St. Jago!" were the delighted exclamations of the triumvirate, as they eagerly extended their fingers to the arms which were at once abandoned to them. "Saw ever men such firelocks? and, God be with us, each of the pistols has got two barrels, and the locks, how clean they are in their click—perfect jewels—Spain never forged such—they must have come from England!"

"Ah! caballeros," said Clifford, with a smile. "You know the proverb—'money is a good thing but life is better'—and gentlemen in my profession can't afford to risk a lock missing fire. But the senors are right—the remark shows them to be good judges of such matters—Spain did not forge them—they came from

the heretics beyond sea. How the Virgin ever gave to these unbelieving dogs the power to fabricate such weapons is beyond my comprehension—but so it is—the senors are right—they are English!”

“And where was your worship fortunate enough to purchase such gems?”

“*Caramba!* When a man has been as far south as the Rock of Gibraltar he can get other things besides silks and cigars!”

“And there you bought them?”

Clifford smiled.

“And are they really good ones?”

“The locks and the powder are sure, and to let you into a secret”—and Clifford stooped down, and in the tone of affected confidence, whispered in the ear of the Andalusian. “I never miss my mark. So,” continued he, in a louder tone, and with a laugh of contemptuous indifference, “what need have I of attendants when I have six men’s lives at my belt?”

The Andalusian looked at his two companions.

Clifford marked the glance but said nothing. He was watching the game.

There was a pause for a minute.

“A good friend or a bad enemy, you would be, *senor*,” said the Andalusian, at length, “and that, no doubt, is the reason why you have been selected as an escort by the *senoras* in the litter.”

“Your worship is a person of observation,” said the young soldier, in a tone intended to flatter the vanity of the speaker—“but in this instance you are wrong. I travel on my own account, and joined the party by chance.”

“But you accompany the *senoras* to Madrid?” said the Andalusian, in a tone of interrogation.

“*Senor caballero*,” said Clifford, “I am astonished that a person of your discretion should have asked such a question. You forget,” continued he, with a meaning glance, “that it does not suit the safety of gentlemen, who, like myself, are at issue with the king’s officers, to hint at their future movements. Who said I was going to Madrid? I have been with the *senoras* to-day—*Caramba!* Who can tell where I shall be to-morrow? But what ails your worship?”—continued he, as his companion started from his seat and gazed

at the doorway—his hands clenched—his lips opened—as if some object had been suddenly presented to his sight, the cause alike of terror and hatred. Clifford turned round, and there, at the entrance of the chamber stood his guide Perez, pale, motionless, rigid—with his fierce Asiatic eye fixed on the Andalusian, as if he too had met a rattlesnake in his path.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROBBER AND THE GITANO.

FOR an instant the two men retained their attitude of hatred and defiance. It was but for an instant, however, as at the same moment it seemed to occur to both that the present was no place for exhibiting their antipathies. By a strong effort, each obtained the mastery of himself, and shortly reassumed that calmness of manner which forms the distinguishing feature of the Spanish character. The Andalusian once more took his seat by the fire, and engaged in conversation with his companions, while Clifford's mysterious guide directed his steps towards the host, and inquired what was to be had for supper.

The ventero gave the expected reply, *Hay-todo*, "There is everything,"—a phrase, which in Spain means, in fact, nearly nothing. On investigation it was found that the venta of San Juanilla was no exception to the general rule; but Perez and the muleteers of the ladies were too old travellers to be deranged by the emptiness of the cellar, or the larder. They had, in passing through the town of Aranda, taken advantage of a celebrated wine-store, and had filled their botas, or leathern bottles with liquor of a superior quality. From the same place they had brought a hare, some partridges, and a piece of bacon. The coarser viands which were to form part of the puchero, were procured from the host of the venta.

The travellers proceeded to discuss the supper, when ready, with eager appetite. When the meal was over, the leathern bottles were handed round rapidly; questions were asked, and stories told, sometimes referring to the incidents of the late war, and the prospects of its renewal; but most frequently to matters in which the guests took a keener personal interest—the most recent robberies on the roads, and the numbers and audacity of the

highwaymen. When curiosity had somewhat abated, the tables and stools were once more cleared away, the landlord's daughter and one of the muleteers again occupied the floor, and exhibited their proficiency in a bolero to an admiring audience; while from the corners of the apartment, filled by parties less devoted to Terpsichore, came laughter, and gossip, and song.

At length night wore on, and the guests wrapping their persons in their large brown cloaks, betook themselves to repose. Some stretched their limbs on the floor of the kitchen, or near its fire, while others sought the stable and lay down beside their beasts.

Amongst these was Clifford. His mule, as the last arrival, had been placed close to the outer door, and thither he proceeded. In a Spanish *venta* undressing there is none. In one minute he had stretched himself upon the straw, near the head of his faithful four-footed friend, and soon was, or appeared to be asleep.

Perez too had selected his place of repose. It was not, however, as it usually was, in the stable. Possibly, in the party whose appear-

ance had so much startled him, he had recognised an enemy, and feared the darkness. Whatever the reason, he lay down on the floor of the kitchen, and within the light of its fire; his feet towards it, but with his head close to the wall, so as to prevent the possibility of any one approaching him unobserved; and he, too, in his turn appeared to sleep.

An hour had elapsed, and everything was still. The host and his family had long since retired; and the deep breathing of all around told that most of the inmates of the hostelry were in the land of dreams. It was then that the Andalusian, who had taken up his quarters in a dark corner of the apartment, cautiously raised his head. Everything seemed to intimate that he alone was watching. With noiseless gesture he gradually raised himself to his feet, and taking his rapier in his hand, he once more cast his eyes round the room, as if to assure himself of the slumbers of his companions. The scrutiny was apparently satisfactory, for he stole across the chamber, and with noiseless step approached the muleteer. Already he stood by his side, and, drawing the sword from its sheath, was stooping as if to strike a blow, when Perez suddenly

raised himself to a sitting posture by the aid of his left hand, while with the speed of light his right drew from his belt the long deadly knife, with the use of which his tribe is so familiar. For an instant the eyes of the two men as they gazed fixedly at each other, flashed fire, and it seemed as if each were prepared for a death struggle. All at once a change appeared to come over the intentions of the Andalusian, for he returned his sword to its scabbard, and beckoning Perez to follow him, said in a low but distinct tone, "Accursed murderer, I would speak with you." Without awaiting reply, he then left the kitchen, and cautiously proceeded through the stable to the outer door of the *venta*.

For a few seconds the Gitano seemed uncertain how to act, for a shudder shook his well-knit frame, and his swarthy cheek flushed and paled by turns. At length he seemed to have adopted a resolution, for he sprung to his feet, and gathering his cloak upon his left shoulder so as to leave the right arm free, he followed the Andalusian.

When the latter reached the front door, he raised the latch, and went out, moving slowly

towards the forest. Perez, too, in his turn, left the house, and having closed the door, by a few rapid steps suddenly approached his companion from behind. Whatever were his purpose, it was anticipated, for the Andalusian turned round, and waving his hand, with a smile, pointed to his left side.

“No—no—sir Gitano,” said he, “I trust you not. To the front, I say—to the front! Your accursed race are too handy with their knives to be let out of sight. Come, keep in a line with me, and move!

“And whither go you?” said Perez, and the tone, notwithstanding the agitation lately exhibited by the gipsy, betrayed neither excitement nor fear. It was cold, calm, self-possessed.

“But to yonder tree, cowardly slave,” said the Andalusian, misinterpreting the cause of the question. “And fear not that I shall put you to death to-night. I have need of you.”

As he spoke he moved towards a solitary chestnut of large size which stood close on the bank of the little river that ran by the venta. The ground around it was on three sides open

and free alike of large timber and brushwood. On the fourth, it fell precipitously to the brook, which pursued its course in a rapid and noisy stream at the foot of the bank, but lay in deep shadow, for the branches of the giant monarch of the forest stretched themselves over its waters and intercepted the skylight. The ravine was of considerable depth, and had its sides covered with stunted coppice, which occasionally showed itself as high as the level ground.

To this place was Perez conducted by his companion. On reaching the tree, the Andalusian leaned carelessly against it, and having drawn his sword, pointed with a contemptuous gesture to a spot in front, and near him.

“Stand there, Gitano,” said he, “I would have conference with you.”

“And what would you with me, Don Ambrosio?”

“Of that anon. Is it not sufficient that I, a Spanish hidalgo, should condescend to interchange words with a heathen hound, like yourself? Now answer my question. Who are the caballero and the senoras?”

“The caballero is, I believe, as your worship

has no doubt already guessed, a contrabandista. The senoras I know not."

"And this is all," said the Andalusian, with a sneering tone. "This is all that Perez the Gitano can tell me."

"All, Don Ambrosio."

"Lying scoundrel!" said his companion. "Know I not the prying curiosity of your accursed race? Do you think that I am to learn to-day how much your pretended powers of fortune-telling are dependant on knowing every member of the families with whom you come in contact? How to aid your women in their sorceries, you spy out, with the cunning of a fox, the names of their intended dupes, their ages, their habits, their vices—all, everything, even to the most minute details of their features and of their dress. Do you think that I, Don Ambrosio, am to learn to-day that such knowledge is not the result of a chance curiosity, of a solitary Gitano, but is their eternal policy; and now with that Judas face of yours, you dare to tell me that you know nothing of the travellers, whose secrets for eight long days you have no doubt been sucking as a weazel sucks an egg? Poor

innocent!" And the Andalusian laughed contemptuously.

"I have told your worship all," said Perez, in a submissive tone. "I can tell no more."

"We shall see, senor Gitano," said Don Ambrosio, with a quiet smile. "Now listen to me. Heathen slave," continued he, in a low voice, whose accents, though scarce above his breath, fell distinct and menacing on the ear of his companion, "you recollect the time when my brother, Don Jorge, honoured a daughter of Egypt by casting on her the eyes of affection. He had a rude way of wooing, had my brother, and the damsel whimpered a bit, and it may be screamed. Do you recollect how one Perez, the brother of the wench, showed his gratitude for the grace and favour that a Spanish hidalgo had conferred upon a brown-skinned sorceress? Do you recollect, I ask, what that Perez did? Answer me."

As Don Ambrosio spoke, the features of the gipsy became distorted from the action of strong internal agony. But it seemed as if the memory of the past had nerved his courage, for his eye flashed, his teeth compressed themselves, and his bearing for the moment was as

bold and resolute as that of the man whom he confronted, and with a calm voice, he said,

“Senor, the worm will turn if you tread on it, and why not the Gitano? Your brother wronged my sister, and I slew him.”

“Murdered him, slave!” shouted the Andalusian. “Slew him, indeed!” cried he, in a tone of the most intense contempt. “You treacherously stabbed in the back with a knife, the man whom you dared not to face with a sword.”

“Each race,” answered the Gitano, coldly, “wars after its own fashion. The children of Egypt may use a mean weapon, but they are content if it do its work.”

“Dog! make you a boast of the crimes of your tribe? But it matters not, the day has come when you have to pay their penalty.”

“Your worship is in error,” said Perez, quietly. “The penalty has been paid already. The matter was brought before the *Audiencia*, and if your brother died, justice held that the provocation was sufficient.”

“It was not justice that willed it so,” said the Andalusian, in a tone almost inarticulate with passion, “it was the interference of that

old dotard the Duke of Escalona. But know, my friend, that the day of the Pacheco is gone by. Viceroy of Naples and Grand Chamberlain, though he may be, he is at feud with Alberoni. *Caramba!* the gardener's boy of Parma loves to comb the crowns of these grantees, and the first corregidor I meet with will be only too joyful to pay his court to the Cardinal, by applying the garotte to the neck of the gipsy Perez—the protégé of his great enemy."

The gipsy was silent. He was too well acquainted with the mode in which the criminal law was administered in Spain, not to know that the threat of Don Ambrosio and his power of carrying it into effect were well founded.

The Andalusian marked his silence, and interpreted it justly.

"Come," said he, in a gayer tone, "I did but mean to show you what I could do; and yet if you make yourself useful, I may be merciful. To revenge a brother's death," continued he, with a sneering laugh, "is as imperative on a noble of Andalusia as of Castile; but somehow, at the present moment, it appears to me that the first duty which Don Ambrosio Pimental owes

is to himself. His pockets need filling, for, to say the truth, they have been more empty of late than befits the honour of an hidalgo. Thou shalt aid him in this matter, and for the present he will spare thee."

"What would your lordship?"

"What! Has not your gipsy blood already scented the secret, as surely as a setting-dog would a partridge? The senorita travels with large attendance—she must be rich; and it would benefit the fortunes of Don Ambrosio, if the crowns and jewellery in the litter were transferred from her pockets to his."

"I see not your worship's drift."

"Yes, you do. You are the muleteer of the contrabandista. The fellow has arms, and looks as if he could use them. You must delay him on the road. To-morrow the senorita must start alone."

The gipsy seemed to feel a sudden pang. For a moment his face wore the expression of intense pain. It was but for a moment, however. Its usual cold character returned, and with apparent apathy, he replied—

"It is impossible, senor. The caballero travels with speed. I doubt not that there be

some speculation in silks waiting for him at Madrid, and if he reach it not, and that speedily, I guess that the enterprise will fail."

"What matters it to Don Ambrosio Pimental," said the Andalusian, drawing himself up haughtily, "whether the miserable traffic of a low-born smuggler fail or succeed. I tell you he must not go to-morrow." "

"How am I to prevent him?"

"Lame your mules."

"Senor," said the gipsy, in accents of despair, "it is impossible. The mules are of a high breed, and the purse of my tribe was exhausted in their purchase. I will not do the animals such an injury."

"Will not, said you—you foul-mouthed hound?" shouted the Andalusian. "I will slay you where you stand." And he raised his sword to strike.

The gipsy went not back a foot. It might be he had expected some such violence, for in an instant a rapid motion of his left arm rolled his cloak around it, at the same moment his right hand drew from his breast a long double-edged knife, the brightness of whose steel flashed even in the starlit night, and poising

himself firmly on his right leg, with his left thrown forward, and with the bearing of a Roman gladiator, he awaited the attack.

For a second it seemed inevitable, for the eyes of Don Ambrosio flashed fire, his left arm flew upwards, and his whole body trembled convulsively, as that of one who was about to expend his strength in a death-blow! Suddenly the humour changed—the rapier dropped—the Andalusian resumed his ordinary gesture, and with a scornful laugh, he said,

“I meant but to frighten you; but again, I repeat, the contrabandista must not accompany the senorita to-morrow.”

Perez, with the changing mood of his antagonist, resumed his ordinary attitude; but his eye was watchful, his left arm still kept the cloak rolled round it; his right hand still held the knife bare, and his whole manner intimated fear of treachery.

“I see not how that may be, senor,” said he, in reply; “the caballero is anxious to hurry on to Madrid, and even if I were to do your worship’s bidding in laming the mules, that would not prevent him; for like all contraban-

distas, he has crowns enough I warrant in his pocket, and would hire others of the arrieros at the venta."

"You are right. If the mules were made utterly useless he would hire others; but for a delay of six or eight hours, it is hardly worth his while. You must make them go lame for half a day."

"Senor, it is impossible."

"Do you prate to me, you lying villain?" said the Andalusian. "Do you speak to me of the impossibility? Know I not that there is not one of your tribe who cannot in a night change a horse, be its colour what it may, to black, or grey, or brown, and make for the time the sound lame and the lame sound. I am not to-day," said he, in a mocking tone, "to learn of the talents of the children of Egypt, more especially of the knowledge of the *hokkano baro* possessed by that most accomplished scoundrel Perez the Gitano. Your mules *must* be lame to-morrow."

The gipsy was silent. Over his expressive countenance changing feelings passed rapidly. At length he seemed to have adopted some

resolution, for, with the air and voice of one who submitted himself unwillingly to a necessity he could not avoid or control, he said,—

“ You shall be obeyed, senor. The mules shall be lame in the morning.”

“ It is well,” replied Don Ambrosio, too much accustomed to carry his point to be astonished at his success. “ But remember, they must be not only lame, but thoroughly lame. If they are fit for the day’s journey, you go, senor Perez, to the scaffold. The host of the venta is a friend of mine. He is not altogether in such good odour with the *Justicia* as so worthy a man should be, and would be happy to atone for any little blunders of his own by surrendering to the Cardinal a follower, and people say a spy, of the hated Pacheco’s. It may be that the thumb-screws or the rack might inform his Eminence that so clever a fellow as Perez the Gitano did not trade between the Spanish frontier and Madrid solely to let out mules or attend contrabandistas.”

The remark, well or ill applied, seemed to exercise a powerful influence over the gipsy, for

he at once replaced the knife in his bosom, and with a tone far more conciliatory than any which he had hitherto adopted, he said,—

“It is idle to dispute with you, Don Ambrosio. You are too powerful for me. The senorita shall depart alone.”

“It is well,” muttered the Andalusian. “But beware, heathen hound,” continued he, as he sheathed his sword, “beware how you betray me, or you shall feed the crows before you are a week older. And now to your roost. I leave you not here to plot mischief in my absence.”

Perez obeyed without reply, and made his way straight to the door of the venta.

Don Ambrosio kept his eyes fixed upon him till he entered, and then wrapping himself in his cloak as if for protection from the cold air of a November night, leant once more against the tree, and abandoned himself to his meditations.

“So that matter is settled,” said he, speaking aloud. “He thinks not that I know the girl, and that she, and not her crowns, is my object; yet they, too, will be welcome. It is

long since we have had a booty worth the taking, but this compensates for all mischances, for it brings both gold and revenge. She will leave the venta at eight. It will be five in the afternoon before she reaches the Bocca Chica; and yet I dare not venture the attack before, for there is a party of Miquelets on the road northward, and it will not do to be caught like a rat in a trap. And now to see after Master Perez. I scarcely know what to make of that fellow. He refused me stoutly at first, and all at once becomes obedient to my slightest wishes. Ha!" continued he, "the thought strikes me. The fellow became honey-lipped just after I hinted that he was a spy between France and Madrid. Has a chance shot hit the mark? By St. Jago, could I light upon some despatches from the enemies of Alberoni, the jolly Italian would make it a better trade for the Pimental than taking purses on the highway. But of that hereafter. If I manage to lay hands on the senorita, I shall have ducats enough, and shall need the aid neither of Cardinal nor King."

So saying, Don Ambrosio abandoned his

lounging attitude, and at a slow pace followed the gipsy to the venta.

As he left the tree, a head cautiously raised itself from the bed of the little river; and over the top of the bank, watching the retreating footsteps of the Andalusian, might be seen the keen eyes of our friend Clifford.

CHAPTER IX.

A DIPLOMATIST PUZZLED.

IT will be necessary to retrace our steps to account for the appearance of Clifford. He had been naturally much struck by the intense antipathy mutually exhibited by Perez and the Andalusian. To attribute it to one of those deeds of violence so common in social life in the Peninsula was easy enough ; but still the event produced painful reflections, as it showed that his gipsy guide had at one time been in habitual intercourse with a man of a character apparently so dissolute as the high-born ruffler of the venta. The hatred displayed by either was intense, and could have been caused by no casual act of wrong, but must have been

the result of a long train of circumstances, connecting the two parties, and in which one or both must have been actors.

There was mystery in this, and mystery seemed to be an indispensable portion of Perez's character. It had not escaped the recollection of the young Englishman that the Gitano had at their first meeting refused to let him the mules at any price, and had but a few minutes afterwards pressed them on his acceptance on his own terms. Such conduct in one of a class so notoriously interested was puzzling enough; but what added to Clifford's embarrassment, as he attempted to unravel the matter, was the fact that during their eight days' journey he had fancied on more than one occasion that he had observed signs of intelligence pass between the gipsy and the young lady traveller, of whom, and of whose very name, Perez had all along professed himself entirely ignorant. Was it possible that the two were in correspondence, and that he, the diplomatist, who prided himself on his powers of reading the thoughts and guiding the actions of others, was, after all, nothing but a puppet in the hands of a gipsy and a girl?

The thought was galling, and had already been the subject of much painful meditation. The adventure at the inn served but to entangle still further the already ravelled skein. Had his mission been discovered?—Was the gipsy a spy upon his motions?—A friend or an enemy?—In what light, too, was he to consider the Andalusian? If Perez were employed by the Cardinal, the man who was evidently his sworn foe might be a useful ally to the English envoy.

In all this there was ample matter for reflection; and, notwithstanding the length of the day's journey, and of the fatigue consequent on it, the young soldier was unable to close an eye.

Clifford's bed-chamber, as we have mentioned, was nothing but a stall in the stable, which he shared with his mule. The night was cold, and for greater warmth he had stretched himself under the manger, where, with plenty of wheat-straw beneath him, wrapped in his mantle, and his saddle for a pillow, he had, for one who had roughed it in the camp, no despicable accommodation. Notwithstanding, however, the luxury of his quar-

ters, he could not sleep. An hour had elapsed since he had betaken himself to his couch, but still his busy mind was employed in speculations, in which the lady, the gipsy, and the Andalusian in turns played their part. His meditations were interrupted by the sounds of stealthy steps proceeding from the kitchen. They were evidently those of two persons. The stall which he occupied chanced to be next to the outer door, and commanded it. Clifford raised himself cautiously on his elbow, and, peering from the dark recess in which he had ensconced himself, beheld the door open. In another instant two figures stood out in strong relief against the star-lit sky, and, to his unutterable astonishment, they were those of the men whom he had deemed mortal enemies—Perez and the Andalusian. In another instant the portal closed, and the parties had disappeared.

“By my honour,” said Clifford to himself, “the plot thickens. There must be some more than ordinary cause why those two scoundrels, so late at daggers-drawing, should walk forth together so lovingly; and it concerns my credit to learn the secrets of their

conference. Oh, Charles Clifford! Charles Clifford! you thought yourself a mighty clever fellow; but I fear your first essay in diplomacy will be to be cheated by a gipsy, fooled by a girl, and, perchance, finish by having your throat cut by a highwayman with a pedigree that reaches up to Don Pelayo! But I must see what the rascals are about."

As these thoughts passed through his mind he sprang from his resting-place, and, advancing to the door, gently raised the latch. He pushed it slightly open, and, holding it a-jar, gazed eagerly around him.

He had not far to search. Though there was no moon, the stars were bright and the night clear; and before him, at no great distance, moving at a slow pace from the venta, he saw the figures of Perez and the Andalusian. They halted, as our readers know, under the chestnut-tree. It was, no doubt, to be the scene of the conference.

"Ay!" said Clifford, as he saw them arrest their steps, "now the scoundrels judge themselves out of ear-shot, and my man Perez will no doubt pour forth his secrets with an amiable frankness, which I have sought for in vain on

the road. It concerns me much to know whether the fellow be a spy on me or not. If I find him plotting treachery, I will send a bullet through his head, as well as his companion's, with as little remorse as I would brain a weasel or a rat. But how to approach the fellows? Ha!" said he, "the ground close by the tree is as black as midnight. It must be the precipitous bank of the river. I'll to the water; its noise will drown my footsteps, and it can be of no great depth, for as we crossed it to-night it scarce reached to the mule's knees."

He left the house, and having first satisfied himself that his pistols were in his belt, closed the door gently, and keeping in the shadow of the wall, moved towards the little river. It was close by. For the convenience of travellers the venta had been built in the immediate neighbour of its channel; and for Clifford to gain the top of the bank, slip down, and find himself in the stream, was the work of an instant. After that, his progress was more easy. The brook meandered perpetually, and described a considerable circuit in its course between the inn and the tree. He was thus able to keep the bank between himself and the parties

whom he sought to approach. At length, after wading cautiously down the river for a space considerably larger than had been traversed by Perez and the Andalusian, the broad shadows thrown over the stream by the giant branches of the chestnut intimated to him that he had arrived at the place of his destination. He listened. Voices came upon the ear, but the murmur of the water made them indistinct. It was necessary to approach nearer. The bank which bounded the brook was steep without being perpendicular, and had its turf broken at intervals by large shrubs, which dotted its side and fringed its top. Clifford did not hesitate; leaving the stream, by the assistance of the occasional brushwood he made his way up the acclivity, till he found himself on a level with the speakers, and in their immediate neighbourhood. There, every word was audible, and the envoy of Lord Stanhope, drawing a pistol from his belt, and keeping his head and shoulders carefully ensconced behind a bush on the edge of the flat ground, listened attentively to the conversation.

Some sentences had, of course, been interchanged between the parties before his arrival,

but they were few in number, and of little interest. Enough remained to give him a general insight into the relations which in past times had existed between Perez and the Andalusian—the seduction of the beautiful sister of the gipsy by a brother of Don Ambrosio, and the fearful revenge which had been exacted for it,—the liberation of the murderer through the interest of the Duke of Escalona, and the influence exercised by Don Ambrosio, through a threat which he held out of still inflicting the penalties of the law on Perez, now that the power of the great noble who had protected him was diminished or annihilated by that of the still more mighty and adverse Prime Minister. Still two things puzzled him. Well acquainted with the cold-blooded policy of the race to which the Gitano belonged, and their callous indifference to robbery and bloodshed, he was unable to understand the interest which Perez evidently took in the preservation of the young lady-occupant of the litter, except by giving full weight to the suspicions he had already entertained, that there was some tacit bond between them. Nor could he comprehend the reason why Don Ambrosio, who was evidently

acquainted with the name of the senorita should have taken such pains to conceal it from the Gitano—except by assuming that the Andalusian too was possessed of the secret of the mysterious connexion between the gipsy muleteer and the fair traveller. One thing was self-evident, and that was, that Don Ambrosio had wrung unwillingly from the gipsy the means of securing the lady's departure alone on the following morning, for the purpose of making her a safer prey to himself and his comrades than might have been calculated on had the seeming contrabandista accompanied her.

The precise projects of the dissolute noble were also in their turn a matter of speculation. While the gipsy was present the language of the Andalusian had pointed merely to robbery, but some few words which had dropped from him after Perez's departure seemed to intimate still greater outrage. Whatever it was, its scene was already determined on. The attack was to be made at a spot called the Bocca Chica; but even this told nothing, for of the place itself, its vicinity, or its distance, Clifford was entirely ignorant.

Amidst such a mass of astounding revela-

tions, half-understood plans, and half-formed suspicions, he remained for some time stupified at the spot which he occupied during the conference. What to do he knew not. One feeling only was fixed and unchanging, and that was to preserve the fair young creature who had, for the past week, been his companion on the road, from the fearful fate which seemed to await her.

The resolution was formed easily enough—how to give it effect was a matter of greater difficulty. His first determination was to seize, the following morning, on Don Ambrosio, and denounce him to the nearest corregidor. But on consideration this plan was abandoned. Its success was, in the first place, problematical, for the young noble would unquestionably resist; and would, in all probability be supported by his comrades and the scoundrel host of the venta. But supposing his capture effected, the real difficulty of the case became evident at once, for the accusation could only be supported by a detailed statement of the name and position of the accuser, and to do this was to betray his own incognito, and sacrifice the success of his mission.

The young soldier was obliged to go to work again. To preserve the secrets of the mission which had been intrusted to him, and at the same time to rescue the fair girl from the fate that awaited her, he must appear on the stage, not as a known and proclaimed defender of her rights through the medium of the laws of the country, or its civil or criminal tribunals, but after the fashion of the knight-errants of old, by his personal prowess, and the vigour of his right arm. This method of solving the difficulty suited better than the former the gallantry and the fearless temper of Clifford. But even in this there was difficulty. To act with effect it was necessary to know when to act, and the information could only be obtained from the Gitano. Would Perez give it, terrified as he was at the threat which Don Ambrosio had held out, of handing him over to the *corregidor*, in the event of his refusing to comply with his wishes. It was doubtful; yet something might be done if the gipsy would honestly lend his aid. Could he be confided in? Upon this Clifford pondered long and anxiously.

“I will trust that fellow,” said he at length to himself. “There is between him and the

Andalusian a feud which can only be washed out with blood. Great as may be his terrors the Gitano can wish nothing but evil to Don Ambrosio. And whatever the promises wrung from him, his secret efforts will be in my favour. Yes—it is no doubt a fearful risk; but trust him I must and will, and with God's help I will save the poor girl from the ruffian and his gang. What eyes she has! how laughing! how eloquent! It were a thousand pities that a glance so bright should ever be dimmed with a tear."

So saying, Clifford once more slipped down into the stream. He slowly wended his way through the opposing current, and effected his return to the inn without his absence having been discovered. The night's adventures had been exhausting enough, but there was still something to do, and instead of once more seeking his rough couch, he took his place in a dark corner behind a pillar that supported the arched stall, and leaning against the stone work with his arms folded, and his head slightly bent, like an out-post upon duty, commenced his watch.

An hour passed, but nothing was heard save

the deep breathing of the muleteers, and the greedy bite of the mules as they refreshed themselves after the day's journey. At length a slight noise made itself audible in the kitchen, and steps were heard on the pavement as of one stealthily approaching. The night-walker reached the door, next to which stood the mule that Clifford had ridden ; but instead of raising the latch, stopped as if listening. Apparently he was satisfied, for he gently moved up alongside the mule, accompanying his step with a hissing sound. The animal seemed to recognise a familiar voice, for she welcomed the new-comer with a low whinnying neigh. At that moment a pair of powerful arms was thrown round him, and Clifford's voice whispered in his ear, "What, Perez my friend, you would start early. But we must have a talk together before we take the road."

CHAPTER X.

THE LAME MULES.

THE mornings of November are cold and dark ; and even in the mountain ranges of the South the elevation of the ground gives to the landscape that chilling, cheerless character, which is familiar to the inhabitants of "the Black North." It is strange how much our feelings are subject to its influence, and how often the despondency, which throws its shadows over the spirit, is but the result of the melancholy produced by the external atmosphere. Alas ! for the ambitions of poor humanity, when the aspirations of its Master Intellects may be nipped in the bud by the material influences of a winter's storm !

The morning which, on the first of November, gradually broke over the little inn that had been the night's quarters of the travellers, possessed something of this dispiriting quality. The wind had risen towards dawn, bringing with it heavy clouds, which occasionally burst in torrents of rain; and the lofty range of the Somo Sierra, whose peaks and forests frowned gloomily enough under a mid-day sun, assumed an even more forbidding aspect, through the medium of the masses of dark vapour, which, now resting on its summit, and now rolling heavily before the storm, showed for an instant, or concealed, as if in a moving panorama, its dim and broken outlines.

Such was the scene that met the eyes of Mademoiselle de Chalais as she descended from her chamber, and looked eagerly towards the heights which were to be traversed in her day's journey. The prospect was little cheering, and for a moment her cheek blanched and her eye lost its usual gay expression.

“What think you of the weather, *senor contrabandista*?” said she, turning to Clifford, who had followed her to the door of the venta. “That mountain looks black enough, and,

with its clouds, and precipices, and woods, has much the air of one of those horrible places which the old romancers tell us were the haunts of giants, and ogres, and magicians, who used to pounce upon any unfortunate damsels that came within their reach. You look grave, senior," continued she, as she watched his expressive features, over which the recollections of the night were passing rapidly. "By my word, as a fair lady, were I to judge from your face I should say that you believed such things might happen now-a-days as well as in what some wretches call 'the good old times.' Come," said she, after waiting some moments in vain for a reply, "you do not answer me. But I see how it is; you are forging an eloquent speech, in which you are about to prove that you were to play the part of the good knight, who was to put lance in rest, and overcome, in my defence, these monsters of the forest."

"I trust," said Clifford, "that Mademoiselle de Chalais will need no such aid." But notwithstanding his best efforts to conceal his feelings at her badinage, so little in consonance with the probable future, the expression of his eye was grave and his voice low.

“Nay,” said Teresa, laughing, “I begin now to believe, in all soberness, that there are just grounds for my remark, for had you been the knight of La Mancha himself you could not have been a caballero of a more rueful countenance. But who comes here?” continued she, as Perez approached. “No less a person than your trusty squire of Irun, with a face and figure as little like Sancho Panza’s as well may be; and his mission, no doubt, is to inform the senor contrabandista that the mules are ready for the road.”

“Alas! senor—*ay di mi!* senorita,” said the Gitano, wringing his hands, and exhibiting all the signs of intense despair, “I come the bearer of sad tidings. Some son of the devil must have cast on the mules an evil eye. They are lame. They—the pride of the fair of Leon—are all dead lame.” And again Perez wrung his hands, and moaned as if in overwhelming sorrow.

“What say ye, Perez?” cried the young lady, fixing her eyes on his face with a look which seemed to read his inmost soul. “The mules lame and all lame? Pshaw! you mock us. Such a thing could not have happened,

unless it had been done on purpose." And again her eagle glance fixed itself on the Gitano.

Apparently he was unwilling to meet the scrutiny, for, he cast his eyes on the ground, and muttered, in a tone almost inarticulate, "The fact is so, *senorita*. How it has chanced, I know not; but the mules are lame."

Therese again bent on him a look, in which anger seemed mingled with astonishment. "I will not believe it, Perez — I cannot; I must have other evidence than yours with regard to a matter so extraordinary. *Senor caballero*," said she, turning to Clifford, "have you seen anything of those animals of yours? But I ask your pardon," as some sudden consciousness came over her, and her face, under its influence, crimsoned from the temple to the chin. "Ten thousand times I ask your pardon. I have been interfering in a matter which concerns me not; but Perez and I have been so long fellow-travellers, that I had forgotten that he did not form part of my train."

"Madam," said the young soldier, with an air of gallantry, "both he and I would be proud to be enrolled among the attendants of so fair a mistress. But I will go and see the mules

myself. I doubt not the fellow has been rehearsing some wretched joke."

Clifford, accordingly, bent his way to the stable, from which he soon after returned, with his face apparently distorted with anger.

"Scoundrel," said he, seizing the gipsy by the collar, and shaking him with great violence, "this must have been your work. What hinders me from putting you to death on the spot?"

"No, no, for the love of heaven, no," said Mademoiselle de Chalais, interposing, "I pray you do no violence."

But her words were little attended to, and Clifford still continued to grasp the gipsy by the collar, while the fingers of his right hand played, as if unconsciously, with the butt end of the pistol in his belt.

"Holy Virgin! what a coil is here," said a soft voice at his elbow, and he turned round and found himself in the neighbourhood of Don Ambrosio.

"Senor contrabandista," continued the new comer, in the same honeyed accents, "what has raised your anger? Has this poor devil of an arriero displeased you?"

“ Displeased me, indeed ! *Per todos los Diablos !* He has made me mad,” shouted the envoy. “ I am, as the rascal well knows, in a hurry for the south, and here I find all his mules are dead lame.”

“ Come, *senor caballero*,” said the Andalusian, “ things may not be so bad as they look. I have some knowledge of horse flesh, and if the *arriero* will lead forth the mules, perchance I might be able to suggest a remedy for the evil.”

Clifford sullenly complied with the suggestion, and took his hand from Perez’s throat, while the Gitano, evidently well pleased to be free from the grasp of his angry master, hurried to the stable, from which he soon after issued, leading the three animals belonging to him. When first seen at Irun, from their power and beauty they had been coveted by every horse-dealer in the town ; but a single night had produced changes which, to say the least, were extraordinary. The heads of the quondam gay-spirited animals drooped, their eyes were dull, and all three limped in a manner which might have induced the supposition that they had abandoned all claim to a fourth leg,

and intended to content themselves with the use of three for the rest of their lives.

The effect of their appearance upon the spectators was various. Clifford, his teeth compressed, and his hands clenched, looked as if endeavouring to master a violent burst of passion. Mademoiselle de Chalais laughed and wept by turns; while from the lips of the *arrieros* who had left the loading of their mules, and crowded round the unfortunate animals, there arose a perfect chorus of "The evil eye, the evil eye!"

The Andalusian said nothing, but with the air of a man who thoroughly understood the subject, and did not condescend to lose time in useless exclamations, proceeded to the animals, and examined them in turn, looking into their nostrils, raising their eyelids, and tapping each nail of the shoe of the ailing hoofs. The result was satisfactory, for with a smile he approached Clifford.

"*Voto a Dios!* Senor, the mischief is not great. There is something of fever in the head and hoof, and the animals are altogether unfit, in their present state, to crawl a league; but great is the power of science and medicine; and

I have drugs in my saddle-bags of which I will compose a draught so efficacious that I pledge you the honour of a hidalgo that the mules will be ready for the road to-morrow."

"To-morrow," repeated Clifford, as if to himself. "Are you assured of that, senor? Be you certain that in the morning they will be fit to resume their journey."

The Andalusian repeated his confidence in his veterinary knowledge in a tone intended to imply that after his protestations on the subject it would be an insult to him to doubt its efficacy, and hurried into the interior, as if to compound the panacea which was to produce such marvellous results. The Gitano, probably eager to escape from the presence of his master, followed him, and Clifford and his fair companion were once more alone.

"Madam," said the former, "you see my evil fortune. If I am to be the knight who is to protect your journey across this monster-haunted region, Mademoiselle de Chalais must postpone it till to-morrow."

The fair girl made no answer. The tears stood in her eyes, and her whole countenance wore an expression of irritation much greater

than the circumstances appeared to warrant. Evidently, there was a struggle between contending feelings and interests, for smile and frown chased each other over her expressive forehead, changeful and rapid as the humours of an April hour. She spoke at length :—

“ Senor,” said she, with a faint attempt at a smile, “ I must endeavour to travel without your guardianship. I have been already too long on the road, and must reach Buitrago to-night. And here comes the litter,” continued she, in a gayer tone, “ and that, if I were doubtful, would decide the matter ; for I should as soon have courage to face the anger of the Cid as that of my most venerable Master of the Horse, who, with his long sword, peaked beard, cadaverous face, and buckram air, looks as if he had embodied in his own person the genealogies and the dignity of all the nobles of Castile.”

Clifford made no effort to stay her, but assisted the young lady and her companion to their litter, on either side of which stood Don Diego and his chief aide-de-camp, with their broad beavers in their hand, and an air of courtly respect in their manner which would have

done credit to the days of Philip II. When Therese and the duenna had taken their places, the noble muleteer mounted and led the way, the litters and pack mules followed, and the whole cavalcade slowly moved up the hill, and were gradually lost amidst its forests. Clifford watched their progress with an expression which had become gloomy and anxious from the moment that it was no longer subject to the observation of his fair companion, and when, as a turn of the road was screening the party from his sight, she leant from the litter and gaily waved her handkerchief in farewell, a tear started to his eye, and he shivered as if under the influence of a convulsive spasm.

Some minutes had elapsed since Therese had been lost to view ; still Clifford lingered on the spot, his eyes turning from time to time towards the mountain range, as if through its coverts they could still trace the progress of the travellers. His reveries were broken by a slight touch upon his arm, and the Andalusian, who had approached him unobserved, stood beside him.

“ Senor contrabandista,” said he, “ I have

compounded the drug, and given it to your arriero. He will administer it to the mules at sundown, and I warrant your worship will be on the road to-morrow."

"I thank the caballero for his kindness," said Clifford, moving his hat and bowing with profound courtesy. "With such a knowledge of drugs, the senor is provided against mischances, but he is not the less lucky to have escaped them. The evil eye which struck my mules has not affected your jennet, if that noble black horse in the stable, with his large nostril and fiery eye belong to the caballero?"

"He does, senor," said the Andalusian, with evidently gratified vanity. "There are few better steeds in Spain."

"And do you mount him to day, or am I to have the pleasure of your society?"

"*Quien sabe!* The weather looks dirty, and I am a man of independence, senor—a true Castilian, who love my pleasure and do nothing. I travel only to amuse myself. *Caramba!* If the day continue wet I will stick to the shelter of the venta."

With the words, he returned to the kitchen; thither Clifford followed, and wrapping himself

in his mantle, to the occupants of the chamber appeared to sleep.

Never was slumber further from his eyes. As the minutes passed on, his face became more and more clouded, and his teeth compressed themselves together, as if with a fierce energy they endeavoured to stifle some inward feeling of intense pain. At length came eleven o'clock. With the hour appeared the forenoon meal of the *venta*, and the young soldier was aroused to share it. The Andalusian and his two companions had already taken their places at the table, and there too was Perez. The *hidalgo* appeared in high spirits, and eat and drank largely.

“Come, *senor*,” said the dissolute noble, in a gay tone, as he remarked the gloomy looks and scant appetite of his *vis-à-vis*. “What, still brooding over the lameness of these accursed mules? *Vaya!* One in your profession must have encountered many mischances, and a single twenty-four hours’ delay on a journey is not such mighty matter as to make a man miserable. So cheer up. To our next meeting, *senor* ;” and the ruffian filled his tumbler to the brim with wine, and nodding to Clifford,

took it off at a draught. "And now, *senor ventero*," continued he, "the weather is clearing fast, and my friends and I will to the road. So out with your bill, and tell the *muchacho* to bring the horses to the door."

The reckoning was soon paid, and the horses brought round. Ere the adventurers, however, put foot in stirrup, each man carefully examined his girths and fastened over the lock of his gun the leather hood intended to preserve it from the damp.

"We take our precautions, *senor contrabandista*," said the Andalusian, with a flushed face, and with somewhat of a stammer in his speech, as he observed Clifford's eye watching his movements. "We take our precautions, I say. There are always rogues abroad on the *Somo Sierra*, and—*caramba!*—one might meet with them." As he spoke, he mounted his horse. His companions followed his example, and in obedience to a sign from their chief, started off and took the road up the mountain which had already been traversed by the ladies in the litter. The Andalusian watched them till out of sight. He then shook himself loose in the saddle, and touched the horse with his

long, large spurs. The fiery animal plunged violently, but the rider sat firm as a rock.

“Ha! my friend Don Rodrigo,” said he, “thy rest has done thee no disservice. Thou shalt have a gallop to day.” And he slacked the rein, and patted fondly the neck of the beautiful animal, which whinnied with pleasure, and once more stood motionless, as if the caressing touch of his master’s fingers had transmuted him into stone. For a moment or two the rider looked as if he also had become as lifeless as his steed, for he sat rigid in the saddle, his hand upon his thigh, his glance fixed on vacancy, and his colourless face cold and pale as monumental alabaster. Suddenly the eyes lightened, the upper lip curled, and gathering up his reins, and pressing the horse gently with his knees, he rode towards Perez, who was standing some twenty feet in front of the door of the venta, to all appearance employed in studying the points and movements of the Arab.

“Sir arriero,” said he, with the smile of a fiend, “I would speak with you. There is a little matter which in our conference of last night I forgot to mention.” With the words,

he stooped low, and whispered something in the Gitano's ear.

Scarce was it uttered, when the rider struck his horse violently with the spur, and the black steed, as if maddened by the steel, sprung into the air, and with the speed of light followed his companions up the mountain road.

As for Perez, the words exercised on him an almost magic influence, for the strong-nerved man gave a shriek, and clasping his hands wildly, sank to the ground.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PURSUIT.

CLIFFORD hurried to the side of the Gitano.

“Has the villain stabbed you?” said he.

“No, no, *senor*,” replied Perez in a low tone, and raising himself feebly from the ground. “It was but words, yet they stung as sharply as a knife’s point. But this is no time for woman’s wailing. We must away : but first to steady my hand.”

As he spoke he drew from his breast a small phial, which he applied to his lips. Whatever were the contents of the draught, it must have been potent, for its effect was soon evident. In about three minutes the colour began to come to the cheek, and the power to the eye.

With the awakened vitality returned the energies of the Gitano, and he approached Clifford, and with a glance which bespoke some prearranged plan, whispered in his ear, "Senor, we must to work."

With the words he proceeded to the stable, and, bringing forth the three mules, led them to a shed which stood some hundred yards in the rear of the main building, and was usually appropriated to the cattle of the innkeeper. As soon as he had fastened the halters he took from a large haversack, in which were contained some horse-nails, and shoeing materials, a blacksmith's forceps, and applying himself to one of the halting animals, raised the wounded foot and drew from its frog a short, sharp, broad-headed nail, which had been placed within the interior circle of the shoe, and made to act upon the hoof by some stiff pitch, which at once had kept it from changing its position, and concealed it. This done, the Gitano carefully washed the wound with soap and water. The same process was adopted with the two remaining mules, and the poor brutes, freed from the pointed iron which had galled them, once more stepped firmly. Their other ailments

were next the object of attention. Out of their nostrils, Perez washed something of a sickening smell, and carefully spunged their noses, eyes, and heads with vinegar. Yet the treatment, scientific and judicious as it might have been, produced little result. The annoyances which had destroyed sense and spirit had, indeed, been removed, but the drug had been too powerful to allow its effects to pass away immediately, and all three still looked stupified and listless.

“They are pretty well filled out,” whispered the gipsy to Clifford, “for I served them with a double allowance of barley ere I put that foul stuff in their noses, when I brought them out to the senorita; but they will have a sharp day’s work of it, and I must give them something to restore their pluck, and keep them up to their work, were it for a ten hours’ gallop.”

So saying, he proceeded to the kitchen of the venta, and procuring a bucket from the landlord, poured into it several bottles of the strong beer of the country. With this he mixed a little brandy, and added from his haversack some liquid, whose secret virtues, and the proportions in which they were to be

administered, were known only to those most knowing of horse-doctors, the Spanish gipsies. When the potion had been prepared, and its efficacy ascertained by repeated tasting, he returned to the stable, and leading out one of the mules, flung its halter across a beam immediately over head.

“Now, senor,” said he, giving the end of the rope to Clifford, “raise his head a bit, while I give him his aguardiente. *Vaya!*” continued he in a joyous tone, as the last animal had the draught poured down its throat, “look at their eyes now, senor. Would you not swear that they would gallop with any barb in Spain?”

And, certainly, the boast of the gipsy was not extravagant, for the mules, so late lame and languid, stood once more with forward ears, and sparkling eye, and open nostrils, the personification of health, and fire, and vigour.

“And now,” continued the Gitano, “in five minutes we shall be off; and while I put on the saddles, your worship had better pay the ventero. But be careful of the fellow; he is a spy of Don Ambrosio’s, and I see he is already suspicious.”

The instructions of Perez were obeyed; the

mules came to the door, and the travellers were once more in the saddle. Clifford, with formal courtesy, removed his sombrero, and bending to the saddle bow, gave the parting salutation to the host.

“*Con Dios*, caballero,” said the rascally landlord, with a sneer, “I wish your worship a safe journey; but you had better have waited till to-morrow, for it is twelve long leagues to Buitrago. It will be dark ere you reach it, and they say the roads are dangerous.”

“May the Virgin protect us, *senor ventero*,” was the courteous reply; “and as to the darkness—when a man has for ten years been getting bales across the frontiers he becomes like a cat, and can see as well at midnight as at noon-day. So once more, *adios* :” and the parties proceeded on their way.

For a while they moved at a slow pace. Clifford would have hurried, but the Gitano whispered to him, “Not yet, *senor*, not yet. We must walk the beasts till we have got out of sight of the *venta*. Saw you how the old scoundrel smiled? He thinks we are too late, but it may be he is mistaken.”

Thus conversing, the parties reached the

point of the road turning into the forest, and at which Mademoiselle de Chalais and her litter had been lost to the eyes of the young envoy.

“Now, senor,” said Perez, “we are out of sight, and can choose our own course; and in troth we must make haste. Mark you the speed of Don Ambrosio?” pointing to the deep dents left by the hoofs of the Arab in the muddy road. “I will not deny it,” said Perez, his jockey sympathies making him for a moment forget even his hatred, “I will not deny it, Don Ambrosio has as good a judgment in horsetlesh as ever a man in Spain; and were you to hunt for a year, through every fair between Leon and Xeres, I doubt if you would find a horse to match that black Don Rodrigo. But now begins our work, and it is likely to be rough enough, but it will save us a good six leagues, and we must face it.”

They had reached, as he spoke, a small rivulet, which crossed the road, and found a path for its waters down the mountain-side. Here the gipsy left the highway, and turning short to the left, struck into the forest, and followed the course of the little stream, ap-

proaching ór leaving it as his experienced eye detected the safest passage for his steed. Clifford followed close behind, and the baggage-mule, true to its instincts and habits, unguided and uncared for, brought up the rear.

A quarter of an hour found the travellers once more on the open ground. The brook which they had followed was a tributary of the little river which passed the venta, and joined it about half a league above the inn. The banks of the larger stream were fringed with open meadows, which, covered with the finest turf, and nearly level, opposed no obstacle to the progress of the wayfarers. Along these, accordingly, Clifford and Perez advanced at speed, crossing and recrossing the river repeatedly, as its nearer or farther bank offered the greatest facilities for transit. After about an hour and a half's rapid movement, the valley began to narrow; the meadows on either hand scarcely extended more than a few yards from the edge of the water, while from their further boundary, rose the steep sides of the mountain range.

“Now, senor,” said Perez, “here comes one

of the main difficulties of our journey. We are close to the cedar brush. The people hereabout call it Jacob's ladder, and the name suits well enough, for it is more fit for angels with wings to their back, than either two or four legged beasts. Is your heart stout, *senor*?"

His companion replied with a contemptuous smile.

"The *caballero* may laugh," said Perez. "There's many a man who would march up to a cannon's mouth, who would not face the pass above there. The *Maragatos* are the boldest *arrieros* in Spain, but even they will not look at it; and to tell you the truth, except in a matter such as this, I would not risk it myself."

While he was speaking, the travellers had been approaching a portion of the glen, where the mountain, closing in on either side, seemed to defy further progress. On the right, the main river, which had hitherto been in turns murmuring gently among pebbles, or sleeping lazily in long reaches, now poured down over a mass of rocks in a continued sheet of foam. Beyond this, and higher up, the valley ap-

peared again to open, for light came through the branches of the forest as if the sun's rays had found entry behind them.

"It is an ugly place enough," said Clifford, "but I suppose we must face it."

"Face that! There is no difficulty there," exclaimed his companion, in a contemptuous tone. "Here is our path," and he pointed to the right. Clifford turned in the direction intimated, and indistinctly seen through the giant stems of the forest timber, and the thick foliage of the underwood, was the mountain rising like a wall, and down this trickled a tiny rivulet, which now shining like a silver thread among the trees, and now making itself heard in mimic waterfalls, found its way to the stream below.

"Why, friend Perez, you are mad," said Clifford, "there is no track there; and if there were, no four-footed beast could climb such a precipice."

"Track, senor, there is none true enough, for they be few who will look at the pinch; but that stream, paltry as it is, will serve to guide our way, and steep as the bank may be, we must even try it. In the meanwhile, we

will ease the mules, for we must put foot to the mountain ourselves."

He dismounted as he spoke. Clifford followed his example, and the Gitano removed the bridles from the heads of the animals, tying them to the saddles, and muttering as he did so, "The poor beasts will climb easier without them. Did they fall with these powerful Moorish bits in their mouths, they would scarce scape breaking a jaw. Now," said he to Clifford, "I will lead the way. The Capitano," continued he, pointing to the mule which had carried him, "follows me like a dog, and the Duchessa and the Muchacha will stick close to his heels. As for you, senor, beware, if you fall, that you break not the stock of your rifle, and buckle the leather hood tight over the locks. If a branch were to touch your triggers, I should be fairly sped. And now are you ready?"

His companion replied in the affirmative, and the Gitano wading across the little river, which intervened between him and the foot of the mountain, was instantly lost amid the brushwood. For a moment the leading mule seemed to hesitate, and uttered a short whinny-

ing neigh ; but a cry of “ Ho, Capitano, come along my boy,” seemed to be understood by the intelligent animal, for it at once plunged into the stream and made towards its master. The Duchessa, which had been the steed assigned to Clifford, since the commencement of the journey, instantly followed the *macho* ; while the baggage animal, as before, trod close in the steps of its companions.

As they entered the brushwood, and in turns disappeared from his eyes, Clifford stood for a moment lost in astonishment. But it was no time for meditation. The coppice was so thick that a few yards would have been sufficient to remove him from all companionship with his fellow-travellers, and grasping his rifle in his left hand he too plunged into the channel, waded across the stream, and commenced the ascent.

Its character, little flattering as the colours were in which Perez had painted it, had, nevertheless, not been exaggerated. The mere steepness of the range would, of itself, have arrested many men less determined ; but even that difficulty had become infinitely more formidable, from the broken character of the ground, the

thickness of the coppice, and the large logs of dead timber which were everywhere scattered over the surface. Sometimes the mountain side would be scooped into rocky terraces, up which, when low, the mules clambered like cats, and around which, when too lofty to be faced, they made a detour so as to attempt the bank in a more auspicious locality. Sometimes the brushwood was so thick, that it was impossible to force a way through its branches, and even when this was successfully accomplished, torn saddles, and straining girths, showed alike the power of the obstacles, and the desperate efforts of the animals to surmount them; while, at intervals, a gigantic tree lying across the only available roadway would bring the whole party to a standstill, and force them to retrace their steps, and descending the hill to seek from below a more open path. Still Perez struggled on, and slow as was his progress, the rapidity of his ascent far exceeded that of his companion.

Less acquainted with mountain travel, Clifford made his way upward with great difficulty. He had long lost sight of the Gitano and his beasts, but notwithstanding he kept his course

unerringly, guided by the bells on the bridles, or the crackling of the branches, and not unfrequently by loose pieces of rock, which, detached by a struggling hoof, rolled madly down, threatening destruction to any with whom they came in contact; while, ever and anon, there came upon his ear from above the cheerful cry of the gipsy of "Ho Capitano"—"Well done, Duchessa"—"For shame, Muchacha," as with varying voice, and now praising and now abusing the mules, he led the way up the steep.

For a long hour did the travellers struggle on after this fashion. Down Clifford's cheeks the perspiration was running fast as winter rain, and even his strength, energetic as he was, was nearly exhausted, when a sudden silence left him at once without a guide. He shouted, and the shout was returned. It was repeated at short intervals, and in some quarter of an hour more he rejoined his party.

Perez was sitting at the foot of a perpendicular rock, which towered high among the trees, and extending along the face of the bank, offered, apparently, an insurmountable obstacle to their further progress. A small spring of pure water was at his feet, and near

it stood the three mules, their flanks and necks white with foam, while their drooping heads and half-closed eyes showed the exhaustion produced by the ascent.

The gipsy himself seemed to have suffered scarcely less than Clifford, for his face was deadly pale, and his long, matted, dark locks were dripping with perspiration, while a convulsive heaving of the chest showed that his breathing had not as yet resumed its ordinary tranquil character. Still, gloomy as was his mood, the first appearance of his master could not help provoking the ordinarily grave Gitano to a smile; for the velvet jacket and silk waistcoat, which, on the preceding day, had excited the envy and admiration of Don Ambrosio, were in tatters, and even the broad sombrero had lost a portion of its brim.

“A thousand pardons, *senor*,” said he, gaily; “I must have laughed had I died for it. By my troth, the bushes seem to have made intimate acquaintance with your worship’s wardrobe.”

“*Vaya!*—who cares?” said Clifford; “I would give the best suit in Madrid for a few minutes rest, and a cup of that crystal water.”

“ Spice it with aguardiente, senor ; I pray of you mix it with the brandy ; feverish as you are, the cold spring would be death. Ah, that is right,” as Clifford produced a flask from his pocket ; “ but be moderate, and now sit you down here, and when you have recovered your wind, we will talk.”

In silence he followed the direction of his guide, and for five minutes not a word was spoken by either party. At length, as respiration returned, Clifford looked around him, but his glance betokened anything but satisfaction at the survey.

“ Well,” said he, at length, “ we have mounted that accursed hill, but unless, Perez, you can provide us with wings, I do not see how we are much benefited, for this cliff says ‘ halt ’ to all further progress, and as far as I can judge, it runs along the whole face of the hill.”

“ You are right, for a good league at least.”

“ *Per todos los Diablos*—the news is pleasant. So our fatigues are only commencing.”

“ Our fatigues are over. It is our danger that is about to commence.”

“ You speak in riddles, senor arriero,” said

Clifford, pettishly, and he flung himself once more at full length on the turf.

“I will make the matter simple, your worship. I told you when we started from the river that we should follow the little rill that joined it. There,” continued he, as he pointed to the spring, “is its source. We are now near the top of the mountain, and four hundred yards more will put us on easy ground.”

“*Voto a Dios!*” said the young soldier, joyously, “I am glad to hear the work is so nearly over.”

“Softly,” said the Gitano, “recollect the old proverb which bids you not to halloo until you are out of the wood. The work is still to do; do you see this rock?”

“A blind man might safely answer that question in the affirmative. It is a good hundred feet high.”

“Our destination lies on the other side of it.”

“Pleasant news enough, but I could have guessed that without your aid. What I want to know is, how that other side is to be got at?”

“Come and see,” replied Perez. “Nay, leave your rifle on the ground, we will return.”

The gipsy rose and moved towards the left, along the foot of the crag. At no great distance, their view was interrupted by a thick brushwood, which grew close up to the base of the cliff, and through this the travellers made their way.

Clifford was the first to force a path through the leafy screen ; but scarcely had he cleared its branches, when he started back in terror. The Gitano who had followed close behind him, saw the gesture, and interpreted it correctly.

“Your heart fails you, senor,” said he ; “then all is lost, for there is the road to the Bocca Chica.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOCCA CHICA.

THE scene that met the eye might have tried firmer nerves. The mountain range which had hitherto exhibited itself in steep slopes and occasional rock, seemed here to have suddenly arrested its course, for, with a face as perpendicular as a plummet-line, it shot down in a fearful chasm to the plain below. Above, it rose some hundred feet over the heads of the travellers. Along the precipice, and on the same level as that on which stood Clifford, ran a ledge scarcely three feet broad, and occasionally uneven in its surface. It wound round the rock till it disappeared from the sight, and alone broke the smoothness of

the mountain wall. The scene was gloomy enough, but the wind of a November day, which had been unfelt in the thickness of the forest, came in gusts along the face of the crag, and, as it rose and fell, now sighing and now in a louder tone, added, if possible, to the dreariness of the landscape.

“ Well, sir Gitano !” said Clifford, in a tone of irritation, as he turned from contemplating the scene before him, “ the chasm is, no doubt, magnificent, but I am in no humour for the picturesque. Where is the path you spoke of ?”

“ There,” said the gipsy, pointing to the narrow ledge which ran round the rock. “ That, senor, is our road to the Bocca Chica.”

“ Are you mad, gipsy ?” said the young soldier, turning in anger to his companion. “ Is this a time for mirth ?”

“ Senor, I jest not ; along that ledge is the only road to the Bocca Chica.”

“ God of heaven, sirrah ! On foot or on mule it is certain death to undertake it.”

“ If not certain death, it at least brings a man nearer it than he would go willingly. I warned your worship before we started that the journey by the pass was no child’s play,

but you told me that you had a stout heart, and I brought you here."

There was silence for some minutes; Clifford gazed long and anxiously at the fearful chasm below, and his cheek paled; but still he spoke not.

"Senor," said the Gitano, coldly, "the moments are flying fast, and ere an hour be over, the senorita will be the spoil of Don Ambrosio."

The thought brought back the blood in a crimson flush to the brow and cheek of the young soldier, his teeth compressed themselves, his eye lightened, and his whole manner was that of a man determined on a desperate enterprise. "I expect not to see the sun set," said he; "but it matters not; better that my bones should bleach at the bottom of the cliff than that that fair girl should be the prey of yon ruffian noble, without my having made at least an effort to save her. So be stirring, Perez, I will face the pass."

The gipsy nodded, as if in approval; and the two retraced their steps to the mules.

As soon as they had reached them, Perez

began to ungirth the baggage from the pack animal that carried it.

“What are you about, man?” shouted Clifford; “what new whim is this in your head?”

“Sees not your worship,” said Perez, in reply, “that the *tercios*, bulging from her sides, would throw poor Muchacha over the cliff. We must have all on the top of the saddle.”

As he spoke he carefully removed to the back of the animal everything that was likely to catch against the face of the rock and impede its progress. Saddle-bag and haversack, pot and pan, bread, bacon, and onions in their several repositories, were artistically heaped upon each other, and in their lofty and irregular outline gave to the poor brute somewhat the appearance of a camel. This done, the gipsy carefully tightened the girths of his own mule and that of Clifford's, replaced the bridles on their heads, examined minutely bit and stirrup-leather, and, finding all right, prepared to mount.

“And now, *senor*,” said he, addressing his

companion in a tone whose gravity bespoke the importance of the occasion, "we must not speak together in the pass. We shall have enough to do to keep our heads steady. The Muchacha," pointing to the pack mule, "may chance to hesitate on the road. We must place her carefully between us; with the Duchessa behind her, she must go a-head. Muchacha, therefore, will follow the Capitano; while your worship will bring up the rear. And now one word more: keep your feet well under the mule, and your legs close to the saddle; one touch of knee or toe against the rock, and you are a gone man. And, remember, finger gently the bridle. The Duchessa is sure of foot, and knows how to choose her path better than you can guide her. So, now to the saddle, senor; and hold your rifle in your right hand. There is a sort of attraction in a precipice; and if your head swims, and you get giddy, the weight of the firelock may, perchance, act as a counterpoise, and keep you in your seat."

The gipsy mounted, and when Clifford had followed his example, looked round with a grave air at the mules and his companion;

and then, gently touching the Capitano with the spur, he led the way in silence towards the rock.

The first part of their progress was simple enough. They followed the line of the cliff, at the foot of which they had been sitting, forced their way through the brushwood, and found themselves near to the precipice, and at the end of the narrow ledge which was to form their path.

On reaching it the leading mule stood still, drew himself up slightly, and snorted as if in terror. The gipsy bent forward, and patted the animal affectionately on the neck.

“What! Capitano, my old boy, are you frightened? *Vaya!* It is nothing. Look at it again.”

The intelligent creature seemed to understand its master's words, for it stretched forth its neck, and, applying its nostrils to the opening of the rocky pathway, snuffed the ground carefully, turning its eyes from right to left, now looking at the rock which formed the right boundary of the roadway, and now at the edge of the precipice on its further side. Apparently the result of the investigation was not

satisfactory, for the mule once more raised its head and stood still.

“Ho! Capitano,” said its master, as he carefully followed each movement with his eye, “do you think the road too narrow? *Carao!* it is broad enough; look at it again, man;” and once more he patted caressingly the neck of his steed.

Poor Capitano seemed hardly to know what to make of it, for again the nostrils were applied to the ground, and again he snuffed every inch of the breadth of the roadway.

Probably as he became familiarized with its appearance its dangers diminished, for one fore foot was carefully placed upon the ledge, and then another, till at length, gaining courage as he proceeded, he gave a slight snort, and, picking each step as carefully as a cat, entered on the path. Upon his back sat his master, upright as a bolt, and looking for the moment as if he had been converted into stone.

The Muchacha was, according to Perez's wishes, to come next. The animal was young, and, less acquainted than its companions with the perils of the mountains, was timid from inexperience. As the Capitano entered fully on

the path, the pack mule advanced eagerly ; but on suddenly arriving at the edge of the cliff, threw itself back on its haunches, uttering at intervals a low whinnying neigh, as if to awaken the sympathy of its master. Perez understood the poor brute, and turned his head.

“ Muchacha, my beauty—my love—my charmer, come. It is nothing—positively nothing. Ay, look at it again. I knew you would not be frightened—a brave mule like you, Muchacha. *Carao!* That’s it ; bravo, Muchacha. Well done, my bud of beauty.”

While Perez had been speaking, the poor animal had been eagerly examining the path, but not with the calm air of the Capitano. On the contrary, its motions were nervous and rapid. It turned head and eye anxiously from side to side—again and again put one of its fore feet on the ledge—and again and again withdrew it. At last, seemingly forced by the praises of the Gitano, it gathered together its body, as if for a desperate enterprise, and, with knees and hocks bent, and trembling in every limb, entered the narrow roadway, and in another minute had joined its leader.

It was now Clifford’s turn, and, fortunately

for the nerves of the rider, his mule did not exhibit the same repugnance which had been shown by the others. Probably the instinct of the animal had satisfied it that the pathway, which had been safe for her companions, would be so for her, for, except that on approaching the ledge she, like the others, lowered her head and snuffed the road in its whole breadth, she made but a moment's halt, and, with a calm but careful step, followed the leading mules.

Her rider was not so self-possessed. At first, indeed, the yawning gulf below turned his head, and made him so giddy, that he had nearly lost his seat. He instinctively shut his eyes, and for some seconds the only thing that recalled him to a consciousness of his actual position was the dull echo of the mule's feet as it picked its steps along the rocky way. By degrees confidence returned. He ventured to open his eyes at intervals, till at length, as his head and vision strengthened, he was able to look around him with a steady glance and unblanched cheek. His struggles had not been unobserved. From time to time Perez had cast back an anxious look at his fellow-traveller; and now, as he saw him sitting firmly in his

saddle, and surveying calmly the pass, he sent back to him a smile and a nod of congratulation.

In the mean time the mules proceeded safely along the pathway. They had accomplished two-thirds of their passage, and Clifford was beginning to congratulate himself on the prospect of a speedy termination to his difficulties, when a new danger suddenly forced itself upon his notice.

The mule which Perez rode had long recovered its perfect self-possession. Its head, which, in the first instance, had almost brushed with its nostrils the roadway, was once more carried erect, and it had resumed its usual firm step. Suddenly its new-born confidence disappeared, and it came to a dead stop. A cry of the Gitano warned the animals behind; and they, too, obedient to their master's voice, at once arrested their steps. The check had been so unexpected, that Clifford was thrown forward; and it was only the lofty front of the Moorish saddle, aided as it was in height by his cloak, which was strapped upon it, that prevented him from being precipitated down the rock. What was the cause of the delay he

could not learn, for the mules in front impeded his sight, and he had been forbidden by the gipsy to speak upon the passage.

One thing, however, was evident, and that was that some more than ordinary difficulty had occurred ; for he could see distinctly that Perez's mule, with lowered head and arrested steps, was repeating all those pantomimic gestures of terror which it had exhibited on first entering the pass. All at once the Capitano made a sort of a convulsive scramble forward, and, having gone some ten yards in advance, stopped suddenly. The Muchacha followed, but no sooner had she reached the obstacle than she gave a slight scream, and retreated so suddenly that she had nearly thrown Clifford's mule off its legs. The courageous Duchessa, however, kept her footing, and her rider was able to see the cause of the pack mule's terror.

The ledge along which they had been travelling, narrow as it was, had scarcely ever been less than three feet in breadth, and, for the most part, unbroken in its surface. At the point at which they had now arrived a dent had been cut into it. This was of no great width, but as it went nearly up to the

face of the crag, it separated entirely one portion of the roadway from the other ; while upon either verge of the cleft, the path, as it approached and left it, became more confined, having its side towards the precipice turned up in a sort of rude edging. The cleft itself shot down boldly into the chasm below, and the only mode of passing it was by a scrambling jump ; dangerous, not from the breadth to be traversed, but from the slipperiness of the rock under foot, which made it difficult alike to obtain on one side the necessary impetus for the leap, or to arrest suddenly the steps on the other.

The pack mule seemed to be fully alive to the peril, for it steadily refused to advance. It was in vain that Perez, who had turned half round in the saddle, lavished on it alternately praise or abuse. Again and again did the poor animal approach the chasm, and again and again did it draw back in terror, trembling in every limb, and uttering a low plaintive cry.

Half an hour had thus elapsed, and still there was no hope of success.

“ We are losing time Perez,” shouted Clifford, indifferent in the excitement of the moment to his instructions. “ We shall be too

late. We must abandon the mules ; I can dismount on the side next the rock, and join you on foot."

" It would be useless," was the reply. " We are still a good league from the Bocca Chica, and the best speed of the *choris* will be necessary to enable us to arrive in time. You must force Muchacha to the leap. At the back of your saddle you will find a whip attached to the crupper ; untie it, and then shout and hit hard, and Muchacha must take the jump."

Clifford did as he was directed. He unloosed the whip, and transferring his rifle to his left hand, prepared to use it, first patting his own mule caressingly on the neck, as if to assure the Duchessa that she was not the offending party, and had nothing to fear from the lash.

" Now Muchacha," shouted he, " get on, lass. Try it, my girl," and accompanying the words with a blow, he struck heavily with the thong the animal in front. Twice did the poor brute advance, and twice draw back in terror, till at length, maddened by the thong behind, and encouraged by the coaxing invitations of Perez in front, it rushed at the chasm. It cleared it.

but as it landed from the leap, its near hind leg slipped and went over the cliff. The terrified animal made a desperate effort to recover itself, but its shoes found no holding upon the treacherous surface of the rocky causeway, and it sunk back towards the precipice. For an instant it hung by its fore legs to the ledge, and then with a scream dropped down into the abyss.

In the meanwhile there was a dead silence, for Perez and Clifford had alike been watching the struggle with feelings of intense agony. Some minutes had elapsed since the ill fated creature had sunk into the gulph, but not a word was uttered by either of the travellers, and both still sat gazing over the precipice as if they sought in its indistinct depths to learn the fate of their unfortunate companion. The gipsy was the first to awake from his stupor. He passed the back of his hand across his eyes, as if to wipe away a tear, and then turning round addressed himself to Clifford.

“The poor beast is gone,” said he, “and now it is your worship’s turn. May you have better luck. So now for it, senor. Touch the Duchessa gently with the spur, and hold the

reins in your hand, so as to assist her in keeping on her legs when she comes down from the leap ; but be careful how you use the bit, for it is a powerful one."

The envoy of Lord Stanhope, like all Englishmen of his rank, was well accustomed to the hunting field. There are laurels to be gained there as elsewhere, and there is occasionally as much pluck required in a difficult country, as in leading a forlorn hope. Clifford had thus the advantage of experience. Gathering the reins in his left hand, he shook himself loose in the saddle, and struck the Duchessa with the spur. The spirited animal at once obeyed the touch, and advancing with a confident pace, gallantly cleared the chasm. As she landed on the opposite side her fore feet slipped, but the steady hand of her rider recovered her, and in another moment the envoy and his mule were close to the Gitano.

"Bravo, senor," said Perez. "*Vaya*. But that was well done ; with practice I doubt not but you would become as good an arriero as any in Castile. But we must on ; in another hundred yards we are safe."

They accordingly proceeded on their way,

and so much is danger an idea of proportion, that in the case of Clifford at least, he continued his route with a feeling of confidence he had not before experienced. After the dangers of the chasm, the narrow ledge, fearful as had been its first appearances, now seemed positively a tolerable roadway. A quarter of an hour's travelling brought them once more to the open ground.

“And now, *senor*,” said Perez, as they again rode side by side, “we have no time to lose. That poor devil, *Muchacha*, has cost us a good half hour. If we would reach the *Bocca Chica* in time, we must hurry on with our best speed,” and with the words he struck the mule with his spurs, and went off at a gallop followed closely by his companion.

In the meantime the hours had been passing on. The short-lived sun of a November day was sinking fast, and already the shadows of night began to spread themselves over the forest.

After riding about a league along what seemed the summit of a ridge, (for the ground over which they moved was nearly level,) the travellers found themselves on the edge of a

little valley. It ran nearly parallel with their course, descending gently to the left, and was about fifty yards across. Its surface was carpeted with the finest turf, and free of timber, but on either side the ground rose rapidly, and was studded with forest trees, mixed at intervals with coppice, and the still thick foliage of the chestnut underwood.

“There,” said Perez, pointing out to his companion the green line of the little glen, which was seen from the high ground through an opening in the forest, “there is the Bocca Chica. It runs down to the low country, and is the only bypath in the mountain by which horsemen can reach the highway. We are now within two hundred yards of it, and it is where the main road crosses the head of the valley that we shall find the Andalusian. So take the hood off your locks, and shake the priming loose in your pan, for now comes the time to prove the worth of your rifle.”

In accordance with the instructions to his companion, Perez drew up his mule and removed the covering from his long Spanish gun. While Clifford availed himself of the short halt

to chip his flints, and see that everything was in readiness for the emergency.

“And now, senor,” said the gipsy, “to the road. We are still in time to defeat the schemes of Don Ambrosio.”

His congratulations seemed ill timed, for scarcely had the words been spoken, when the sound of fire-arms was heard from the top of the glen. The riders instinctively checked their mules to listen. A pause for an instant followed the report, and then came upon the ear a long wild shriek, in whose heart-rending accents Clifford had no difficulty in recognising the voice of Therese de Chalais.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESCUE.

THE young girl's voice seemed to be recognized by Perez as well as Clifford, and at once dispelled the stupor which had been produced in him by the report of the fire-arms ; for spurring his mule, he left the level ridge which they had hitherto followed, and dashed madly down the bank, shouting to his companion as he went. "To the Bocca Chica, senior. To the Bocca Chica. They must pass that way."

Clifford lost no time in obeying the summons, and in a few minutes the two had reached the foot of the hill. When they had arrived almost at the open ground which formed the

little valley, the gipsy jumped off his mule and ran at speed to the edge of the copse, calling to his companion to follow his example. Clifford accordingly threw himself from the saddle, and leaving the animal to join its comrade, hurried forward. In another moment he had joined Perez, who had taken his place beside a large bolderstone, which some convulsion of nature had rolled from the adjacent heights, and which now projected from the copsewood into the open part of the glen.

Scarcely had they reached it, when, by the indistinct twilight, some figures were seen appearing in the distance. As they approached Perez and Clifford had no difficulty in recognizing the Andalusian and his companions of the hostelry. They were not alone, and their accompaniments bore sad testimony to the success of their enterprise. The party moved slowly, as if without fear of pursuit. One of the inferior robbers came first, carrying across the crupper of his horse some large packages, which it required no vivid imagination to comprehend were part of the loading of the baggage mules. The ruffian who followed led one of the pack animals by its halter, and upon its

back sat a young girl, who from the motionless and rigid fashion of her person was evidently bound to the saddle. Last of all came Don Ambrosio: partly, probably, because in the event of an attempt at rescue or escape, he had more confidence in his own powers of defeating either than in those of his comrades; and partly because the mule, unwilling to leave its companions, moved sulkily along, and could at intervals be pressed forward only by the lash being applied to it behind.

Clifford took in the cavalcade and its arrangements at a glance.

“Let the first scoundrel alone,” said he. “The baggage may go. I will take the fellow who is leading the mule, and you can deal with Don Ambrosio.”

Perez nodded, and the short, clean click of the locks was the only thing that broke the silence.

In the meantime the horsemen came leisurely down the glen. The first, with the baggage on his crupper, was allowed to pass by. As the second came opposite Clifford, the rifle was slowly raised to his shoulder; for awhile the piece vibrated slightly, and then was motion-

less. At the same instant came its clear, sharp crack upon the ear. The aim had been true. The ruffian had been hit in the head, but except the *thud*, as sportsmen term it, or the dull crash of the striking ball, there was no sound. The man fell like a sack of lead upon the turf, and the terrified animal that had carried him rushed wildly into the forest.

Almost at the same moment Perez had fired at Don Ambrosio, but his aim had not been so happy, for the Andalusian, who at the report of Clifford's gun had suddenly checked his horse, no sooner saw the fate of his comrade than he struck spurs into black Roderick, and galloped fiercely down the glen. Once more Clifford raised his rifle, but again the good genius of the Andalusian preserved him, for he sat firm and uninjured. Yet the ball had not gone scathless. It struck the horse in its side. The noble steed jumped convulsively into the air, and then resumed its wild gallop, as if the bullet had only given to it a fiercer impetus. It was but for a moment, however, for all at once the animal dropped dead, flinging as it fell its master violently on the turf. Clifford and his companion had eagerly watched its

progress, and no sooner had the horse fallen than Perez drew his knife from his bosom and rushed towards Don Ambrosio. He was again unsuccessful. For more than a minute, indeed, the Andalusian had remained stunned with the fall, but his limbs had been uninjured, and as soon as his scattered senses sufficiently returned to enable him to comprehend his situation, he betook himself to his feet, and ere the gipsy could traverse the distance which separated them, had managed to stagger to the brush-wood which bounded the ravine, and was soon safe from pursuit amidst its recesses.

In the meantime, Clifford dropping his weapon, hurried towards the unhappy Therese. She had become stupified by the fearful extent of the misfortune which had overtaken her, and though the fresh report of the fire-arms, to a certain extent, roused her from her apathy, terror prevented her understanding the efforts that were being made in her favour ; and it was only when Clifford approached her, and his well-known voice sounded in her ear, that she became conscious she was saved. The shock, even joyful as it was, was too much for her agitated nerves, and with an hysterical shriek

she flung her arms round his neck, and dropped her head on his shoulder.

It is not of frequent occurrence that a young man is embarrassed by a beautiful girl's cheek being pressed against his, but it was so with Clifford. It was in vain that he attempted to soothe the feelings of the sufferer with words of consolation. It was in vain he essayed to detach the fair arms from his neck. The poor girl seemed to fancy that they were dragging her from her only friend, and at each effort to remove them only clasped him more convulsively. The unconscious caress had from its associations become intensely painful, and Clifford eagerly welcomed the approach of Perez, who, on losing sight of Don Ambrosio, returned to his master. With his aid, the cords were cut which bound Mademoiselle de Chalais to the saddle, and she was lifted to the side of a little rill which meandered along the valley.

The plentiful application of its waters to her face and temples rapidly restored consciousness, her senses returned, a violent burst of tears followed, and becoming once more composed, she professed herself able to rejoin her party.

She would have walked, but her limbs refused to support her; and Clifford, after a feebly muttered dissent, took her in his arms and slowly made his way up the glen to the high road.

Thither Perez had preceded them, eager alike to announce the recovery of *Mademoiselle de Chalais*, and to ascertain the extent of the disaster which had overtaken her servants. He found, as he expected, the party in great disorder, and the ground strewn with drapery and mule-bags roughly forced open. The more serious outrage had left behind fewer painful results than he had anticipated. A baggage-mule had been shot dead; another bullet had broken the arm of one of the mule-boys; and the *Nestor* of the party, he of the peaked beard and long rapier, had had his head broken by the but-end of a firelock, which had knocked the said head's dignified proprietor from his mule. But beyond that there was little damage done. The duenna, indeed, had fainted on the first attack of the robbers, and had signalled the recovery of her senses by a *Jeremiad*, in which lamentations for the loss of her charge, and of her finery, were strangely mingled; but

the appearance of Perez, with the joyful intelligence of which he was the bearer, soon restored her to the little rationality she possessed. By her, and by the whole party, the gipsy was received with acclamations, which were redoubled as Clifford and his fair burden made their appearance.

As soon as the noisy congratulations were subsided, all set to work to repair the damage, and place matters on their former footing. The scattered habiliments were collected together, the bales repacked, and Perez once more hurried down the glen to bring up the mules, which had been left in the wood. When the baggage was arranged, preparations began to be made for resuming their journey. But in this a difficulty occurred. Therese positively refused to enter the litter. Probably the recollections connected with it had affected her nerves, but whatever were the cause, it was in vain that her attendants repeated their entreaties. The young lady was obstinate. She would walk to the post-house.

“It is morally impossible, *senorita*,” said the gipsy; “Buitrago is a good league off, and the roads are miry.”

His efforts, like those of the others, were unsuccessful. At length a compromise was effected. Therese consented to ride Clifford's mule. The arrangements were then rapidly proceeded with. The abigail transferred her respectable spinsterhood to her mistress' litter, and took her place opposite the duenna; while the wounded muleteer was lifted into that which had been hitherto occupied by the ancient waiting-woman. The baggage belonging to the dead mule was placed on that of Don Diego's lieutenant, while the worthy caballero was left to walk on foot. As to the Master of the Horse himself, thanks to the thickness of his skull, he had so far recovered from the blow given by the but-end of Don Ambrosio's gun, as to be able to sit on the back of his steed, and there he was placed by the joint efforts of his colleagues. All was now ready. For greater security, Clifford and Perez reloaded their fire-arms, and the former having given his carbine to be carried by the gipsy, addressed himself to the care of his fair companion.

Taking his mantle, he folded and arranged it carefully on the broad Spanish saddle of the

Duchessa, and on this he placed Therese. But the position was no secure one, and the events of the last hour had robbed the rider of the self-possession necessary to enable her, unaided, to retain it; and so many slippings and half-stifled cries attended the recommencement of the journey, that her newly-constituted guardian had nothing left for it but to pass his arm round his companion and steady her on her seat. No opposition was offered. It is probable that her recent terrors were still too vivid to allow her to think of the minor conventionalities, for she was, or at least appeared to be, unconscious of a position which at another moment would have been productive of so much blushing and embarrassment.

In the meanwhile the party moved onwards, and in about an hour reached the inn.

The hostelry of Buitrago was nearly in the centre of the Somo Sierra, but on its southern side. The wild country had long been without a sufficient refuge for travellers, and one of the first acts of the first king of the new race, after he had been securely placed upon his throne by the peace of Utrecht, was to create one.

Philip V. was a true Bourbon, and inherited

from his grandfather, Louis XIV., all his passion for roads, bridges, and buildings. In accordance with this, to facilitate his communication with his paternal kingdom, he had built near the summit of the range an inn of a larger and better description than the hostelrys usually found on the Spanish roads, and had added a barrack in which were quartered some half dozen Miquelets, or police, as a check on the savage population of the mountain district.

But though the monarch had, by the expenditure of public money, erected a tenement amply sufficient in the number and size of its rooms for the wants of the wayfarers, the internal decorations and furnishing were necessarily left to the tenant; and here, as elsewhere, both exhibited all that scantiness of luxury, or even necessities, which is so universally regretted by Spanish travellers.

As soon as they had reached it, Therese withdrew to her chamber; and Clifford, true to the smuggling character he affected, followed the rest of the party to the kitchen, where the events of the day's journey became to the numerous guests, who already occupied it, the subject of eager discussion.

Supper was over, the last morsel of the puchero was exhausted, and the larger portion of the occupants of the chamber lay stretched upon the ground wrapped in their brown mantles, and smoking their paper cigars, or asleep.

Clifford was not among the number. To say the truth, notwithstanding his fatigues, the incidents of the last four-and-twenty hours were sufficiently eventful to prevent his retiring to his night's quarters in one of the numerous bedchambers which the bounty of the king had provided, and which had been reserved for him.

On the preceding evening, as our readers have probably guessed, he had held a long conference with Perez, and had informed his guide of his having been present at his interview with Don Ambrosio—of the instructions of the Andalusian for laming the mules—of the spot in which the attack was to take place, and more especially of the acquaintance possessed by the dissolute noble with the young lady's name, and his intention not to confine the outrage to robbery. The Gitano had listened to all in a manner which exhibited a strangely mingled interest in the senorita, and terror for

the threats of his old enemy. He at length, on the repeated remonstrances of Clifford, had undertaken to attempt a rescue by guiding his companion through a pass in the mountains, which diminished by one-half the length of the road, but on the condition that Clifford should carefully avoid exhibiting any consciousness of the arranged plan, and should, on the appearance of the lame mules in the morning, affect the most violent anger at the delay. This he had promised to do, and as our readers are aware faithfully kept his word.

So far things had gone well; but now that the excitement was over, all the half-disclosed knowledges, which had lately come crowding on him, rose to his mind, and suggested ample food for reflection. He recollected that Don Ambrosio had expressed a knowledge of the young lady's name, and that this circumstance, when mentioned to the Gitano, had more than all others excited the terrors of his guide. What was that name? It was evidently not *Mademoiselle de Chalais*, for by such an appellation the *senorita* had been frequently spoken of by her attendants in the presence of Don Ambrosio and the other inmates of the hostelry,

and that long prior to the interview under the chestnut tree. No; the Andalusian had never been out of Spain. The name with which he was acquainted must be her Spanish one—that which she and her duenna had ever carefully kept secret—and Clifford felt satisfied that this mysterious designation must be known to the Gitano. Again and again during their day's ride he had made an effort to learn it, but Perez had always found an excuse for eluding a reply; he was either pressing forward or hanging back, or calling to the baggage mule, or, in short, doing anything but what was required of him. The difficulties connected with their hurried journey had for the moment prevented his young master pressing an answer, but now he determined to force one from his guide.

And what, it may be asked, was the reason of his anxiety to learn a matter in which he was so little interested. The blush of honest indignation rises to our cheeks while we write that the representative of two powerful kingdoms was in the fair way to love or lunacy. Alas! That the symptoms of both should be precisely identical. When a creature of clay,

with a thousand imperfections, bends in adoration before another creature of clay, imperfect like himself—when he doats on cheeks ere long to wrinkle, and worships eyes which soon must lose their lustre—when he sacrifices fame, and position, and wealth, the most substantial blessings of life, and its richest prizes, for the fleeting favour of a smile—what is all this but madness? And yet what is this but the history of human passion.

And Clifford was no wiser than his fellows. Scarce eight days had elapsed since his meeting with Therese at Irun, and already he loved her as if he had known her from his childhood. Nor after all was it otherwise than natural. Life, to measure it justly, should be counted not by minutes but by sensations. There are worthy folks in the world, with cold sympathies and good digestions, who but eat and sleep—rise and go to bed. To such, the record of each day is but the stereotyped history of that which precedes and of that which follows it; and their existence, though it may be spun out to the allotted threescore years and ten, is, in fact, but of a four-and-twenty hours' duration.

How different had been the career of Clifford

since he had known Therese de Chalais. Into the short period of their acquaintanceship had been crowded incidents sufficient for half a century. The unexplained mode in which he had been attached to her party—her mysterious connexion with the Gitano—her brilliant beauty—her high-bred manners—her conversation, ever affecting ignorance of the world's notabilities, and ever exhibiting a knowledge of them—their loiterings together by the wayside during the time of their mid-day halts—the robbers—the danger—the rescue—and more than all, the interest which he could not help thinking she had taken in his fortunes, had each contributed their fascinations to an extent which had in vain been combated by his philosophy.

Repeatedly had he whispered to himself that the fair lady might be an adventuress; that with his person, his talent, his connexions, he might make a brilliant marriage. Nay, more that Lord Clifford would probably refuse his consent to any that was not in accordance with the distinguished prospects of his son. It was of no avail. The image of Therese kept its ground, till at length the young visionary

began to reconcile himself to what he felt was an inevitable destiny ; and to endeavour to discover some apology for the folly which, like other coming events, was casting its shadows before.

“ If I could learn,” said he to himself, “ this girl’s name, it might be that her family and herself are such as my father would approve. I must, by hook or by crook, get it out of that scoundrel Perez. And now I think of it, I wonder where the rascal can be—strange I do not recollect having seen him during the whole of the evening.”

With the thought he started from his chair, and proceeded in search of his guide. The expedition was not destined to be successful. Perez was not in the kitchen. Nor, though the mules were in the stalls, could any trace of him be found in the stable. Tired with his unavailing search within, he went beyond the outer door. The front of the posada was untenanted. He turned the angle of the wall, and at a little distance thought he observed, lurking near the inn, a figure resembling that of the Gitano. He was possibly in error, for though he hailed the man no answer was re-

turned. Yet there was reason to suspect that his signal had been heard, for the figure stole away amongst the trees. Once more he shouted, but this time at least he met with a reply, for a soft sweet voice addressed him from the balcony overhead.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DECLARATION.

THERESE, for the voice was hers, seemed at first agitated, but she speedily regained self-possession, and with a laugh, whose clear silver tones showed that she had already forgotten, or at least had entirely recovered from the effects of the evening's adventures, she said, "What ails Don Carlos?"

"Is it you, *senorita*?" replied Clifford, "I fancied I saw in the distance Perez, my muleteer, and I called him. But what seek you in the balcony: I doubted not that ere now you had retired to rest."

"I might have done so," said his companion

in a pettish tone, "had I not been hoping for the last two hours that some folks might have the politeness to inquire if I had suffered from the events of this dreadful day."

"If it be to me the *senorita* alludes," said Clifford, "I pray of you to attribute my absence to respect. It is not befitting a *contrabandista* to seek audience of a great lady like *Mademoiselle de Chalais*."

"Nothing could be better worded fair sir, or more humbly spoken. But I will not raise you from your humility. I will still be the *grand dame*, and you but my vassal; and as such I now command you to my presence. There is a certain old lady of my acquaintance who would be shocked at such an idea, and still more at my boldness in expressing it, but the rules which regulate society in courtly coteries—that paradise which she worships at a distance—are unknown in the *Somo Sierra*. Besides, my *monitress* has been asleep this half hour, so most humble *contrabandista* you may approach; and bring your cloak with you, for, to confess the truth, my hall of audience is somewhat scantily furnished."

Clifford required no second invitation. In

an instant he had re-entered the stable, and hurried up the steps which led from it to the upper apartment. The top of the staircase opened on the end of a long corridor, but there was no difficulty in finding the way. A door was slightly ajar, and the narrow ray of light which streamed through it conducted him to his destination.

The room which Therese occupied was of considerable size, but its sole furniture was a brazier heaped with charcoal, a common deal table, and a solitary arm-chair of equally coarse workmanship—the seat which had been provided for her duenna-companion, had probably followed her to her sleeping-room. The only ornament of the apartment was a long-stemmed brass lamp, similar to those in common use in Italy, and derived like them from the Roman model. It stood upon the table, but had been pushed back to its extreme edge, it might be for the purpose of throwing the fair girl's face into the shade. Therese, notwithstanding the gaiety of the tone affected in the balcony, seemed once more nervous and excited.

“ Good evening to your worship,” said she in a hurried voice, as if anxious to take the ini-

tiative in the conversation, "you have brought your mantle with you, and like Duke Robert of Normandy, (for you must know that I claim to be half Norman by descent,) you must make a seat of it. But you are but a contrabandista, senor," continued she, glancing at him with eyes full of malicious meaning, "and why do I speak to you of the Dukes of Normandy!"

"I am but a contrabandista, Donna Teresa," replied her companion with assumed humility, "and know nothing of the caballero you speak of; but if the cloak which he threw on the ground for a seat, were as ragged as my jacket, it was scarce worth the picking up when he went away:" and he glanced with well-acted despair at the dress which, torn almost to tatters, bore sad evidence of the brushwood of the Somo Sierra.

The lady half-closed her eyes, pursed up her mouth, and raised her hands and shoulders in silent sympathy.

"It is positively heart-rending to think of it," said she, as she pretended to wipe away a tear. "What a fine jacket it was; and of the best Genoa velvet too—I am a judge of velvets! And all destroyed; and yet—even had it reached

Madrid in safety—I doubt if it had been worn again.”

“And why?”

“Oh! merely a fancy of mine.”

“You forget, Donna Teresa, that it is the dress of my profession.”

“It may be of a contrabandista’s, but I thought you might possibly change your trade.”

“You would allege—”

“Merely that the first nobles in Spain occasionally don the gay plumage of the Majo for the purpose of disguise, and I deemed it not unlikely that Don Carlos might follow their example.”

The remark, and still more the tone in which it was uttered, recalled in a moment all Clifford’s gravity.

“You mistake, madam,” said he in a cold tone; “with them the adoption of the dress is a matter of amusement; with me it is the distinctive feature of my trade, and of those who follow it.”

“You carry then forbidden wares across the frontiers.”

“True, madam. I am a contrabandista.”

“ And you deal, of course, in silks and laces, and velvets and tobacco. Do you never carry anything else?”

“ Are there any other goods that would repay the risk?”

The two looked into each other's eyes. There was something of malice in the lady's glance, but her companion met it calm and self-possessed.

“ It is strange,” said she at length, “ what odd fancies women take. I have dreamt at times that you are no smuggler.”

“ And why?”

“ I can scarcely tell; but it seems to me that smugglers, for the most part, know only shopkeepers and venteros—their doings and their looks—while you are not only acquainted with the political history of Europe, but with the persons, the virtues, the weaknesses, the manners, the dress of its great men and noble women. Yet such minor traits of character are only revealed to those who have mixed with them.”

“ It was precisely the observation that I was about to make,” said Clifford. “ Nothing has so much gratified me, as that I should have

had the power of adding to my limited knowledge of such topics, by enjoying the society of a lady, whose minuteness of information is evidence, as she has justly remarked, that she has mixed habitually with the brilliant scenes, and among the distinguished personages, she describes so well. A lady, too, who has possessed such admirable opportunities of knowing them intimately, for has she not a burgomaster for her relative, and spent her life in the capital of France—in the Marais?”

Therese laughed and coloured.

“Parried not amiss, *senor contrabandista*,” said she. “So you think—”

“That Spanish ladies, like Spanish gentlemen, sometimes adopt the *Majo* dress.”

“I am not in masquerade.”

“There are deeper disguises than the colour of the *saya*, or the draping of the *mantilla*.”

“You doubt therefore—”

“That you have lived all your life in the Marais.”

“What monstrous incredulity! You would allege then that we are both deceptions?”

“That you, at least, are no burgomaster’s granddaughter.”

“ And you?”

Clifford, instead of replying, began to pace the room. He was evidently under the influence of some strong internal emotion. It seemed as if prudence and passion were contending for the mastery.

Therese remarked his agitation with a smile.

“ Come, *senor contrabandista*,” said she, “ you have not yet answered my question. You say that I am a deception. What are you?”

Clifford stood still for a moment, and then advanced hurriedly towards his fair companion, as if some sudden feeling, overpowering in its intensity, had brought him, in spite of himself, to her side.

“ You ask me,” said he in a low tone, “ what I am. Precisely what I represent myself, your vassal, your slave. Yes, Donna Teresa,” continued he, as he flung himself upon his knees beside her chair, “ whatever may be the apparent contradictions between my acquaintance with society, and the trade I am compelled to follow for the moment, in this at least there is no deception. I love you. I worship you. From the first moment that I saw you at Irun, I felt myself bound to your service by a sym-

pathy over which I had no control. There were interests belonging to others—interests, of the magnitude of which you can have no conception—which I was bound first to have attended to, and yet I neglected them—neglected all that duty and honour should have compelled me to remember, in order that I might comply with your request to watch over your safety. And have I not done so? Ah! Donna Teresa, you avert your head. Have you already forgotten the Bocca Chica?"

"No, no, Don Carlos," replied she, with downcast eyes, as if unable or unwilling to meet the impassioned glance of her lover, "I never can; I never will forget it. But you forget," and she paused for a moment, and then added, "the difference of your rank and mine."

"Alas!" said he, bitterly, "I do not forget it, but I had hoped that the service I had rendered you, might have banished it from your memory. And yet the difference may not be so great; for I know not your position, and mine may be higher than you think of: but even if it were otherwise, is there aught to make impossible the ties of affection? If I were but a mere contrabandista, I have at least

youth, health, and the consciousness of a powerful will ; and would you but allow me to hope for the possession of this fair hand, I promise you that the day will come, and that ere long, that I shall make myself one whom you can acknowledge without a blush. Will you not, Donna Teresa, give me that hope?" And he grasped the unresisting fingers, and pressed them passionately to his lips.

For some time Therese sat motionless. Her head was averted and bent down, for it rested on her left hand. She replied at length, but in a tremulous voice—

"It is impossible, Don Carlos. You build up in your dreams an edifice which can never be realised. Even if my own feelings were for a moment such as to make me listen to you with pleasure, its only result would be to bring misery on me, without in the slightest degree advancing your prospects. I am not my own mistress. My future lot is entirely dependent on the will of an aged relative. Who he is I may not tell ; but I may say this, that he is rich, proud, violent in his prejudices, and a slave to the educational feelings of his rank : more than all, he has an iron will ; and be

assured of this, that he would never consent to give you my hand, even if you were all that your fondest dreams whisper that you may become."

"And do you," said her lover, with passionate eagerness, "in a matter so momentous to life's happiness, consent to be led passively like a sacrifice to the altar, or would you for a moment allow (pardon the expression) the will of a bigoted old man to decide for you in a matter which should be left solely to the guidance of your own affections. You say he is rich. What would have been the value of his riches without his child? And what, Therese, dearest Therese, would that child have been now, had my hand been less steady and my eye less true."

The poor girl shuddered.

"You speak as if you were his property," continued her lover in a hurried tone. "It is false. You are mine. I have won you, as his forefathers may have won their brides of old, by my bow and by my spear; but only dear, dear Therese, to restore to you the liberty you lost, and to give you the power of bestowing it upon him whom your heart dictates should be

its possessor. Have I no claim upon that heart? Does it feel no gratitude?"

Therese made no reply. Weeping had choked utterance, and the heaving of the bosom indicated strong emotion.

"Will you not answer me?" said her lover, as again and again he pressed his impassioned lips to the fingers that were passively abandoned to him. "Will you not say, at least, that I may hope?"

Again there was a pause, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the convulsive sobbing of the young girl, and faster than ever did the tears stream down on fingers and cheek.

All at once there came from beneath the window, a low mournful cry, like the note of an owl. It seemed instantaneously to recall the fair tenant of the chamber to consciousness, for she started up, and clasping her hands wildly, she exclaimed—

"No more of this, senor; I pray you no more of this, and leave me. I beseech you—not a word now, but go at once—at once."

Clifford, too, had sprung to his feet, but there was so much anxiety in his companion's face

that he had not the cruelty to disobey her. He moved towards the door. Once more he would have lingered, but an impatient gesture warned him to depart, and slowly, and with unwilling steps, he left the room.

Confused, stupified, and staggering like a drunken man under the excitement of his feelings, he reached the end of the corridor, and there, unable to proceed further, sunk back into a dark nook and leant against the wall. A quarter of an hour might have elapsed, when he was recalled from his trance by stealthy steps upon the staircase. Two men passed him. They moved noiselessly along the passage, and stopped at Therese's room. The door once more opened, and by the light from the interior the young soldier saw enter, followed by a man wrapped in a large mantle, Perez the Gitano.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ZINCALI.

It is difficult to describe the astonishment of Clifford at the apparition of Perez. During the course of the journey several circumstances, as we have already mentioned, had contributed to excite suspicions that his fair fellow-traveller and the Gitano were not so unacquainted with each other as they had professed to be—suspicions which, in the last few hours, had assumed the shape of certainty. And yet, what could be the bond between the beautiful, and notwithstanding her disclaimer, as Clifford suspected, the high-born girl and the muleteer?

The Gitanos were the vagabonds of Spain. There, as elsewhere, they were wanderers on the

face of the earth. The larger portion of them spent their time in roving over plain or forest, keeping, for the most part, at a distance from the great towns, and confining their visits to the smaller villages, where they were less in dread of the law and its officers—the men professing the trades of blacksmith or tinsmith, and buying and selling mules and horses—the women acting as fortune-tellers, or as the convenient go-betweens in love affairs.

The two professions gave them influence with both sexes. If a great noble wanted a horse of surpassing beauty, it was to the gipsy jockey that he applied to procure it. If a Spanish dame or demoiselle wished, without the knowledge of husband or father, to send a letter to the object of her affections, it was the gipsy woman, who with her basket of ribands and laces was admitted into every house, that was employed as the messenger. But though used, they were not trusted, except in so far as their interests made them trustworthy; and cringing and fair-spoken though they might be with persons of power, it was generally understood that they entertained in secret, an intense hatred to their Christian fellow-countrymen, and did

not hesitate to murder, without scruple, any unfortunate traveller who chanced to fall into their hands in the wild regions which are so common in Castile, and which formed their favourite haunts.

With all these circumstances, Clifford, from his long residence in Spain, was necessarily well acquainted, and the knowledge served the more to confuse his speculations with regard to Donna Teresa and Perez. That the gipsy might be employed by the young lady was simple enough. She might be rich, and the services of the Zincali were always to be bought with gold. But what more especially excited his wonder was how Mademoiselle de Chalais, who from the purity of her accent was probably a Frenchwoman, or who, at least, from her residence at Paris, was intimately versant with the sayings and doings of the French Court and French society, could have formed any acquaintance with one of a race which belonged to a distant land and was so generally marked with obloquy. And even if this could be explained, what was entirely beyond his comprehension was the still more extraordinary fact that she had contrived to create in her own favour a

passionate devotion in the bosom of one of a people which notoriously never extended their sympathies beyond the pale of their own society. Yet such a fact was indisputable. It had been authenticated by the anxiety shown by Perez in his conference with Don Ambrosio, and he had since given proof that the sentiment was no passing or doubtful emotion, for to save the young girl he had twice risked his life,—at the cliff and at the Bocca Chica. Such were some of the speculations which floated across the mind of Clifford as he lay on his couch; but the day's journey had been severe, its events exciting, and exhausted nature at length sunk to sleep.

His slumbers were long and deep. The fatigue had of course no small share in producing them; but what probably no less contributed, was the unwonted solitude of his chamber; for the new inn of Philip V. had been able to offer a private apartment, where neither the restlessness of his fellows in the kitchen, nor the noise of the mules in the neighbouring stable, had as of old disturbed his repose.

When he awoke the sun was already high in the heavens. Astonished at the neglect of the

Gitano to summon him, he hurried on his clothes and proceeded to the door. It was locked. With an impatient fist he thundered against its panels, and shouted loudly for release. The clamour seemed at length to awaken attention, the sounds of approaching steps were heard, a key turned, and the sub-officer in command of the small body of Miquelets or police entered the room.

“Senor caballero,” said he, “it was by my order that your door was fastened. It is necessary for me to report to my superior, the corregidor at San Agustin, the outrage which took place yesterday, and however painful it may be to me to delay you on your journey, I must take your evidence with regard to the identity of the robber that was shot at the Bocca Chica. I have already sent off my men with some peasants to bring back the body. When it arrives, and the forms that justice require are gone through, you will be allowed to depart.”

Clifford, however much he might be irritated by the new delay, had, of course, no alternative but to submit, and in search of breakfast make his way into the kitchen. As he passed

through the stable, to his surprise he remarked that it was nearly empty. Of its well-filled stalls only two were occupied, and these were tenanted by the mules of the Gitano. Still more astonished, he shouted "Perez!" with an angry voice, and in an instant the gipsy appeared.

"Scoundrel!" said Clifford to him, in an angry tone, "why have I been permitted to sleep so long? It is already late, and we should have started at least three hours back."

"The commander of the Miquelets gave orders that your worship was not to be disturbed, and I had no choice but to obey him."

"And what has become of the other inhabitants of the posada?"

"The arrieros started at day-break."

"The arrieros, fool!" shouted his angry master; "what care I for the muleteers! I spoke of Mademoiselle de Chalais."

"The senorita also left ere the sun was well above the horizon."

"Gone!" muttered Clifford to himself, in unutterable astonishment. "Gone! after the service I have rendered her, and without bidding me adieu. It is impossible!"

"Yes, *senor*," repeated the *Gitano*, in a quiet tone; "the *senorita* went, as I said, at day-break, and the officer here gave her two of his men as a protection as far as San Agustin. She sleeps there to-night."

"And how far is San Agustin?"

"Eight leagues, *senor*."

"I can reach it, then, this evening?"

"Easily, your worship. If we get away an hour after midday we can manage it well enough, and, I doubt not, by that time Don Balthasar, the officer in command here, will have no further need of your worship's presence."

I must see her again, thought Clifford, as he turned abruptly from his companion and sauntered into the forest: I must see that girl once more. Strange that I, who have beheld unmoved, the handsomest women of the handsomest courts of Europe, should, on a few days' acquaintance, fall so madly in love with one whose position is so ambiguous, and of whose very country I am ignorant. Her French is as pure as if she had never left the *Quartier St. Germain*; but then, her Spanish is as good as her French; and had she not addressed me in the latter language, I should have sworn to her

being a born Madrilena. She calls herself, too, Mademoiselle de Chalais. The name is noble—most noble; sixteen quarterings at the least in the escutcheon; for the Prince de Chalais is a nephew of the Princess of Ursins, and she was a Tremouille. Ha! a thought strikes me. The princess was the friend of my mother, and for twelve long years the mistress of the Spanish monarchy. Can there be any connexion between the ambitious woman whose whims agitated Europe, and my fellow-traveller? But no, it is impossible; and yet, notwithstanding the evident absurdity of the thought, there are circumstances that would almost make me believe in it. Ah! Donna Teresa, you escape me not again so easily. When we meet this evening I will solve the doubt; and then—and then—and he once more turned his steps towards the inn, indulging as he went in a thousand speculations, amongst which was one, as to whether his father, the proud Lord Clifford, might consider a relative of a French princess of sufficiently high birth to be the bride of a son of his own far-descended line.

It was about an hour after noon before Clif-

ford and Perez were able to resume their journey. Fortunately, however, the posada in which they had passed the night, though near the summit of the range, was on its southern side, and the easy descent offered no obstacle to their rapid progress.

Little conversation passed between them. The incidents of the preceding night had, as we have mentioned, aroused suspicion; and Clifford continued his route in silence, now meditating on the events which had connected a being so beautiful with one of the wild race to which his guide belonged, and now endeavouring to discover the cause of the interest which she took in himself and his movements. The vanity of his age would occasionally whisper that the lady's machinations had no other source than a plot on his own attractive person; but then came the recollection of the scene at Irun. At that time he was utterly unknown to his fair companion, and there must have been some stronger reason than mere fancy for the manner in which she attached him to her party, or rather, to speak with less gallantry but more truth, had forced herself upon his society.

What increased his doubts was the fact, that two or three times an occasional slip of the tongue, or forgetfulness of manner, seemed to intimate that Donna Teresa was aware that he was not the person he affected to be. Of his political mission, conducted as it had been with such anxious attention to secrecy, it seemed impossible that she could know anything; but still, in a hostile country, the mere discovery of his being no contrabandista, however little his real character might be suspected, was pregnant with danger and productive of anxiety.

The mood of the gipsy was equally taciturn. He too appeared to have given himself up to his own thoughts. It might be the loss of the pack-mule and the unlucky escape of Don Ambrosio occupied him, or it might be that he anticipated the doubts entertained by his master of his infidelity, and feared, by entering upon conversation, to provoke questions which he might find it inconvenient to reply to. Whatever was the cause, he also was silent, and the two pursued their journey, in manner at least unconscious of each other's presence.

After about four hours' riding, the travellers

approached the foot of the range. They had already left behind them its steeper passes, and had entered the broken ground which so invariably forms the outskirts of a mountain chain. The route followed by the wayfarers occasionally partook of these inequalities, and, as it held its straight undeviating course through the tumbled country, rose and fell with the undulations which it traversed. For the last half-league the track had led across a plain, which formed a sort of miniature table-land. The level ground itself was free from timber, but its edges fell down precipitously towards the water-courses which bounded it, and they were thickly studded with forest and brushwood.

It was into one of the beds of these mountain torrents that the Gitano and his master were descending about nightfall. The road had been cut deep into the bank, and its narrow way offered little more than sufficient room for the passage of the mules. The cautious animals were moving slowly down the steep declivity, the reins were upon their necks, and Clifford, forgetful of everything around him, was deeply sunk in meditation, when his musings were disagreeably broken.

The brushwood seemed at once instinct with life, and some two or three dozen of half-naked gipsy children stole from the bushes on either side, and crowding round him, asked for charity. As Clifford advanced, they were joined by lads and women; the men of the tribe in turn made their appearance, till at length a mob amounting to nearly a hundred filled the road.

With their numbers the confidence of the beggars seemed to increase. The low whine with which they had at first addressed a claim for alms, was gradually exchanged for shrill mocking cries or open menaces, while some bolder than the rest, took hold of the bridles of the mules, or clung to the stirrup-leathers. The last acts seemed to awaken Clifford to a sense of his danger, for he struck the Duchessa with the spur, and shouted to his companion—

“Ho! Perez, the scoundrels are likely to prove troublesome. Out with your knife, man, while I send a bullet through the head of the fellow who is trying to stop my way.”

Clifford suited the action to the word, and was drawing with his right hand a pistol from his belt, when his movements were interrupted

from a quarter which he had not anticipated. Perez, as if for safety, had brought his mule close alongside of his companion, but instead of responding to the appeal in the manner expected, suddenly flung his arms around him, and, ere the envoy of Lord Stanhope was able to free himself from the hostile grasp, a dozen powerful hands had seized upon body and limb, and in another instant a mule-girth, which had been kept in readiness, was passed over his head and buckled tight behind his back. As soon as he had been rendered helpless, his rifle and pistols were taken from him, and a cord, passed round his waist, was attached to the rings of his Moorish saddle, and fastened him to the seat. Having thus made defence or escape alike impossible, his captors hurriedly left the main road, and following the course of the mountain torrent, whose ford had witnessed the catastrophe, struck into the forest.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MOORISH TOWER.

THE party continued their way at a rapid pace. After ascending the river for about a mile they turned to the left, moving in a south-westerly direction, and in a line somewhat parallel to the public road, but still, notwithstanding the increasing darkness and the occasional density of the forest, with a rapidity and decision which marked their familiarity with the ground they were traversing.

After about an hour's travelling there appeared on the right some lofty towers, which rose above the trees, and from their massiveness and great elevation were seen distinctly enough against the sky. Towards these the

party bent their way. On mounting a gentle ascent, the pathway conducted them to a piece of open turf, probably the site of the barbican of ancient times, and the exercise-ground of the castle chivalry. Beyond was the main front of the building.

It was of great extent, and, as far as the uncertain light enabled Clifford to judge, one of those feudal structures of the middle ages, which, alternately possessed by Goth and Moor, retained traces of the architectural taste of its various masters ; now frowning heavily in some donjon keep, and now flaunting against the sky in one of the long, slender, minaret-capped towers, which characterize the edifices of the Saracenic era.

The entrance to it was by a gateway still entire, and through this, after crossing a fosse green with grass, the prisoner was led into the courtyard within. A buzz of voices had prepared him for its being tenanted, but the numbers of the occupants went far beyond his calculations. The great court had been built after the mode which the heat of the climate seems to have suggested in all ages and countries to the inhabitants of the south. It was

surrounded by a series of arcades, over which projected the rooms on the first story. The ground floor originally had probably been intended for exercise in winter season, and protection from the sun in the summer. It now formed the head-quarters of a gipsy tribe, which had taken advantage of the shelter of the arched stonework, and whose numerous fires gleaming here and there amid the darkness, and partially seen through the groups that surrounded them, gave a picturesque character to the locality.

As soon as the party escorting Clifford had passed the gateway they checked his mule. They then unbound the cords which had fastened him to the saddle, and having placed him on the ground, led him up a spiral stair which occupied the interior of a circular tower at one of the angles of the courtyard. There were doors on the first and second floor, but his guides paused at neither. At length, on reaching the highest story, the party halted before a portal thickly studded with large iron nails, and which, from its opening not from the great staircase, but from the top of some half-dozen narrow steps which were at right angles to

it, seemed to intimate that it led to some flanking tower or building which projected beyond the main edifice. The door was unlocked, and Clifford introduced into the apartment within.

It was a room of moderate size—it might be twenty feet square, and seemed in a better state of preservation than the other portions of the castle. Still, however, its appearance was wretched enough. The walls had originally been painted in rude fresco, but little remained of the magnificence, for the greater part of the plaister had fallen to the ground. The windows, too, were open. In the south of Europe glass has always been rare, and in early times its use was confined solely to the interiors of palaces. Sashes, therefore, there were none, but, unhappily, the large wooden shutters which had once supplied their place had also fallen out, and nothing opposed the entrance of the night air, which now swept round the chamber with its usual low moaning sound, melancholy at all times, but doubly so in the ears of one predisposed to painful contemplations. Wretched as the place was, it had seemingly been prepared for the reception of its new occupant, and an attempt made to give it a cheerful character.

In the large chimney, for fortunately for Clifford the room bore that impress of its Gothic character, a fire was blazing; near it a pallet bed had been prepared, while the addition of a rude stool and table completed the catalogue of its furniture.

In this apartment Clifford's conductors paused. Without uttering a word they removed the mule girth which had fastened his arms to his side, and leaving the room, locked the door behind them.

During the early part of his captivity the prisoner had alternately indulged in violent outbursts of passion, or sought by questions to learn the object of his captors, but his anger and interrogations were alike received in sullen silence. It was in vain that, assuming that plunder was the object of the gipsies, he had not only offered them all the money about his person, but had promised them a hundred crowns, a sum sufficient to tempt the rapacity of half the Gitanos in Spain, in the event of his being immediately and safely carried to Madrid. It was in vain, too, when the bribe failed of success, that he had endeavoured to alarm his captors by threats of vengeance to be

exacted by some potent friends for the outrage against his person ; nor promises, nor threats, nor questions awoke reply, till at length the young envoy, hopeless of producing any effect, imitated the taciturnity of his guides, and submitted passively to their wishes without expressing dissent or making opposition.

“ Well,” said he to himself, after he had been left alone and looked ruefully round the apartment, “ I doubt if I have any reason to congratulate myself upon my talent for diplomacy. First,” continued he, counting on his fingers, “ I hire a muleteer who turns out one of a gang of as great scoundrels as any in Spain ; secondly, I must needs make acquaintance with a girl of whom I knew nothing but that she had a pretty face and a pair of bright eyes ; thirdly, I play the Don Quixote, and instead of minding my own business, must scour the road for the purpose of succouring distressed damsels ; (it would have served me right if I had got my head cracked for my pains ;) and fourthly, after finding out that my rogue of a guide was a Gitano, I must needs keep him in my service, and so prepare the way more easily for his leading me into this pitfall. What will Lord Stanhope

say when he hears of my folly? And what do the scoundrels mean to do with me? They can be no vulgar cutpurses, or they would have taken my money long ago. To suppose them political agents is absurd, for they and the authorities are the worst of enemies. So what to make of the matter I know not; but *paciencia*, as the Castilians say, unless they cut my throat to-night or starve me to-morrow the thing must sooner or later explain itself. But I may as well see what my quarters are like. It is possible that I may find a means of escape."

With the thought he proceeded to examine his chamber. The survey was not difficult to make. Its bare walls had nothing in the shape of furniture to relieve the gaunt surface. On one side was the large fireplace—decidedly, as it was now filled, the most attractive portion of the apartment. Opposite was the open window before described. Upon investigation it promised nothing. It seemed full fifty feet from the ground, and faced the north, as in the clear starlit sky the belt of Orion and the Great Bear were both distinctly visible. The door by which he had entered was too well fastened to suggest hope, but there was one of smaller

size on the other side of the room, which he had not as yet visited, and to this he now applied himself. The portal was closed simply by a bolt opening from the sitting-room, and upon this being drawn yielded at once to his touch. He passed through, and found himself on the top of a large square tower. The roof seemed arched, and the embrasures all round it were still perfect. It apparently stood at the south-west angle of the building. From its summit the view was unbroken, and from the clearness of the southern sky, and the brightness of the starry night, the general outlines of the surrounding landscape were seen distinctly enough.

While approaching his prison through the forest, the density of the wood had confined Clifford's view to such an extent as to make him altogether unable to guess at his whereabouts. Now, from the top of the tower he was better able to understand the position of his dungeon. The old building occupied the point of one of the southern spurs of the Somo Sierra. To the west and north, the mountain range loomed forth against the sky, the dark masses of its forest being here and there re-

lieved by a rocky point or perpendicular cliff. To the south and south-east, the ground fell rapidly, while lights at intervals marked the sites, of the little towns that were scattered around the base of the range. One of these, and to judge from the number of its fires, of considerable extent, was apparently not more than half a league off.

“That must be San Agustin,” said Clifford to himself, “my intended night’s quarters, but *homme propose—Dieu dispose*, and instead, I am the tenant of a garret in an old Moorish Castle in the mountains. Well, bad as it is, if the rascals would let me go to-morrow, I am as well off as in most of the *ventas* of Spain, and with all its faults the place is a deal better than the top of this confounded out-look, so I’ll back to my quarters.”

Accordingly he returned to his bed-room, fastening the door as he passed. He had scarcely done so when his six guards entered the apartment. As before, they were perfectly silent, but their conduct was eloquent enough, for they proceeded without delay to despoil the person of their captive of everything of value he possessed. The large ring which confined his

handkerchief at the throat, his gold and silver, his pocket-book, everything was abstracted, and carefully examined in a business-like manner, which seemed to intimate a complete acquaintance with the mysteries of their craft. Still, when the investigation had been concluded, they seemed dissatisfied; yet it could not have been from want of sufficient remuneration. The bag of dollars was large and paunchy, as purses should be; its fellow with the gold, though smaller, was equally well replenished. Nevertheless the crowns were chucked aside, the purse, containing twenty ounces of gold, neglected, and again and again they turned over the leaves of his pocket-book, as if in search of something more precious than had as yet fallen into their fingers. At length they seemed fairly at fault, and one of them, after whispering to his companions, left the room.

Clifford had submitted to the plunder of his property without any attempt at resistance; nay more, had seen with indifference rings, and silver, and gold appropriated by the Gitanos; but when they threw down the money and re-commenced a second time the examination of his ample pocket-book, peering into its

envelopes, and even separating with their knives the outer from the inner leather, he changed colour, and began to show symptoms of anxiety.

“They cannot surely suspect,” said he to himself, in a tone of doubt, “the existence of the state papers, or the place of their concealment.”

Absurd as the idea appeared to him, his fears were too well founded, for the Gitano who had left the room returned and whispered something to his companions. In obedience apparently to his secret order, they removed Clifford's coat, waistcoat, and shirt. Beneath the last was a thin short under-dress of silk, which fitted close to the skin, and by its unbroken surface presented no facility for concealment. The Gitano, however, seemed to act from information, for this dress also they removed, and, from a pocket artistically placed under the left arm, they took out a small packet done up in leather.

Hitherto, the envoy had borne the investigation with patience and in silence, but with the discovery of the packet, his self-control seemed to have abandoned him; for, springing sud-

denly upon the man who had become the possessor of the precious document, with one hand he hurled him to the ground, while with the other he wrenched the missive from his grasp, and threw it into the fire. Alas ! the effort was unavailing : three of the Gitanos flung themselves upon Clifford and pinioned his arms to his side, while a fourth rushed to the chimney, and plunging his hand amid the half-burned logs, extracted the mysterious packet uninjured, except in the slight singeing of its outer coating.

As soon as it had been recovered, he who had acted as leader of the party carried it from the room, as if to guard it against the risk of future injury. The rest, without exhibiting either anger or astonishment at the violence of their prisoner, replaced his dress, and once more quitted the apartment, locking, as before, the door behind them.

It is difficult to exaggerate the expression of despair which marked the features of the unhappy captive. His usually bold, fearless, insouciant expression had disappeared, and he sat down on the bed, his head sunk upon his breast, his back bent as if with age, and arms

and legs alike offering in their languid attitude the appearance of extreme debility.

“It wanted but this,” muttered he to himself in a low tone. “It wanted but this to fill my cup of evil fortune to the brim. A worthy close to a worthy commencement. I begin my career of envoy by thinking of a pretty girl’s eyes, and I end it by being, like the rest of my sex, her fool, her dupe, her plaything ; for she is, there can be no doubt of it, a spy of Alberoni, and has been employed to inveigle me on the road, and possess herself of my papers without compromising the Cardinal. And now she has got them sure enough, all and every one,” continued he, as he once more commenced reckoning his calamities on his fingers. “First, my commission from Lord Stanhope : secondly, my letter of credence to the Queen, with that to the Marquis Scotti ; thirdly, Dubois’ letter to D’Aubenton, the father confessor, promising him a cardinal’s hat ; and, lastly, Lord Stanhope’s bills on England for fifty thousand crowns. My money, my interest, my introductions, every lever, in short, by which I was to overthrow the power of this

priestly colossus, lost, irretrievably lost." And the unhappy diplomatist wrung his hands in the bitterness of his spirit, and groaned aloud.

In the meantime the night advanced. The wind, which had fallen towards sun-down, had now died away, and in the still air every sound was distinctly audible. It was about two hours since Clifford had been despoiled of his precious documents, but he still sat on his bed, his head sunk, his limbs motionless, his eyes fixed, and unconscious of surrounding objects. The room was nearly dark, for the fire had burned low, and the chamber was unprovided with any light but its flame, as the Gitanos, who had brought with them a lamp to assist in their deed of spoliation, had removed it on their departure. All at once the silence of the forest was broken by the tinkle of a mule's bells. The sound approached nearer and nearer, till at length, as far as Clifford was able to judge, it seemed to stop in the neighbourhood of the south-western portion of the building.

"Some fresh victims, no doubt," said he. "Some new traveller, who, like myself, has been inveigled into this den of thieves; but

from the top of the flanking tower I may chance to have a view of them. I'll to the roof."

He arose as he spoke, and gently unbarred the door which had before admitted him to the summit of the adjacent building. With noiseless step he approached the bartizan and gazed anxiously below. The scene was one well calculated to rivet his attention. In the background was a mule, but with the saddle unoccupied. In front, and nearer him, stood a lady, apparently, from her dress, a traveller and the proprietress of the unmounted animal. It was clear, however, that she was no captive. There were, indeed, some twenty or thirty Gitanos round her, but they all held themselves in an attitude of profound respect, their heads reverentially bent, and their broad-brimmed sombreros in their hands. In the centre of the group, and immediately in front of the lady, was another of the tribe. He seemed to express his devotion even in a more passionate manner than the rest, for he was upon his knees, and presented his fair companion with a packet. The whole scene was lighted up by numerous torches, and amid the darkness of

the forest their bright Rembrandt-like light brought into full relief the principal figures of the picture. It was impossible to mistake them. The kneeling figure was that scoundrel Perez; the gift which he presented was the lost, the invaluable packet; and the lady—for at that moment she chanced to raise her head, and the light streamed clear upon her countenance—was that most faithless of womankind, for whom he had risked life and limb, the lady with the many names, the Donna Teresa of his affections, the Mademoiselle de Chalais of Irun, the Senorita of the road.

Horror-struck at so much treachery and ingratitude, Clifford could not refrain a faint cry. It seemed to act like the exorcism of some holy priest upon evil spirits called into existence by the wand of a magician; for no sooner was it uttered than the torches were extinguished and the parties disappeared behind an angle of the building. Eagerly did the captive peer into the surrounding darkness, but in vain. The lights, the lady, the mule, the gipsies, had all vanished. Once more the forest had resumed its silence and its gloom, and the only shape to which his keen eyes could

give individuality below, was that of a gaunt stunted tree that pressed itself forward on the narrow strip of open ground which encircled his prison walls.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BROTHER ENVOY.

For some time after the inexplicable vision had disappeared, Clifford kept his post on the roof of the tower. Nothing new, however, occurred to awaken curiosity or excite remark, and the chill air drove him once more back to the shelter of his apartment. It was now completely dark, for the fire had burned out, and the embers on the hearth, though still red, no longer afforded even the doubtful light which their flames formerly offered.

The solitude, however, was not long-lived ; steps were again heard upon the stair, the door was unlocked, and his gaolers re-entered the room. Unwelcome as their appearance might

have been supposed, at the present moment they proved to be no disagreeable visitors. Four of them bore an ample supply of fire-wood, a fifth brought up a stone pipkin of red earth, called an olla, containing the usual national dish of hotch-potch, but composed of materials selected with greater attention to delicacy than those which generally form the contents of the supper tureen at a Spanish inn ; while the sixth carried a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine, a knife, fork, salt and pepper, together with a plate, and even a table napkin. The supper was placed upon the table, the fire-wood heaped upon the hearth, and a coarse lamp suspended upon a nail on one of the side walls. This done, the attendants retired. Clifford would have detained them to ask questions, but they affected not to hear him, and left the room without replying. One, and one only, he who acted as chief of the party, paused for a moment ere he locked the door, and said, "*Buenas noches, senor ;*" as if in intimation that the prisoner was not again to be disturbed for the night.

The day had been a trying one for the envoy of Lord Stanhope. He had been robbed and

manacled, and had not only lost all the documents likely to make his mission effective, but had suffered the misfortune at the hands of one whom he had preserved from ruin and dishonour. At a later period of life such an accumulation of calamities would have probably deprived him of all inclination for food ; but he was still young, and youth, whatever be its misfortunes, seldom lacks appetite. Had it really vanished, the goodly odour which began to diffuse itself over the apartment would have speedily reawakened it. For one moment, and no more, did the captive gaze sadly after his retreating attendants, in the next he had snuffed the *haut goût* of the dish beside him, and pulling his stool eagerly to the table, commenced the attack.

The puchero was well worthy his particular attention. There was a pair of pullets so fresh and fat that four and twenty hours could not have elapsed since they had left their well-fed quarters in some neighbouring farmer's poultry yard. There was a lump of bacon—in Spain that pleasant test of Christianity—with fat and lean so beautifully mixed, the lean of so deep a carnation, the fat of so delicate a pink, that it

would have tempted a Jew to abandoning his creed. Then there was a groundwork of beef and jolly sausages, with a single black pudding to vary their flavour, and broad beans, and onions, and peas, and tomatoes, and red pepper, all mixed together in a manner that gave assurance of the skill of the artist.

“By Jove,” said Clifford, as mouthful after mouthful vanished down his throat, “this is a puchero, and something like a puchero. I doubt if Gil Blas’s chef, Joachim, the fellow who used to tickle the palate of the archbishop of Valencia, could have produced anything so good. And now for the liquor,” continued he, as he laid hold of the large leathern bottle, holding somewhat more than a quart, and extracted its wooden cork. “Let us see whether Father Bacchus has been as propitious to us as Ceres, and that other most respectable divinity (I fear her name has never been chronicled) who presides over ready-dressed dinners.” As he spoke he put the bottle to his mouth and took a long and deep draught. “Valdepenas,” said he, replacing the flask upon the table. “Valdepenas, as I am a living man. Where can these children of the devil have picked it

up? Or how am I to explain their conduct? They rob me, and they feed me like a prince; ay, and with suitable attendance too: a maître d'hotel, a butler, and four footmen. Lord Clifford himself could not but be satisfied with the respect paid to his son. But it is no use puzzling myself about the rascals and their future intentions. 'Business to-morrow,' said some, no doubt, wise man in Greek history, 'and business to-morrow,' would say my two chiefs, Lord Stanhope and his blackguard little friend, the Cardinal Dubois, were they in my place; so 'business to-morrow,' say I."

With the words Clifford addressed himself to the good things before him. Ere he quitted the table the plump capons and the Valdepenas were things that had been. He then heaped fresh billets upon the fire from the fuel which had been profusely left by his attendants, and flinging himself upon his couch, was soon fast asleep.

The sun was shining bright on the following morning when he awoke, and after the keen breezes of the mountain, the warmer air of the south struck genially on the senses. The hour was late, and the first glance satisfied him that

others were earlier risers than himself, for the fire once more burned brightly in the chimney, while the remains of the supper of the preceding night had been removed, and its place supplied by a cold roast partridge, some bread, and a fresh bottle of wine. Their appearance was tempting enough, and Clifford, rejoicing in the appetite of three and twenty, played the part of a trencher-man with as brilliant success as if he had been upon lenten fare for a fortnight.

“No doubt of it,” said he, as he lounged against the fire-place, and, lighting a cigar, abandoned himself to its enjoyment. “The ancients were right. There is a difference in the temper of Philip full and Philip fasting. I feel myself in the most merciful of humours after such a supper and such a breakfast, and could almost forgive my worst enemy.”

The words had been spoken aloud, and it seemed as if they had been listened to, for the door was opened gently, and Perez stood before him. His appearance, however, was too much for Clifford’s recently-announced charitable resolution, for his face flushed crimson with anger, and springing forward, he seized him by

the collar. "Now," said he, "my good fellow, you and I have an account to settle. What reason can you give me why I should not fling you out of the window?"

The Gitano offered no resistance, and appeared to feel no embarrassment. On the contrary, with a quiet smile, and in a calm tone, which marked confidence, he said—

"Two most excellent reasons, senor. The first is, I have but to whistle, and ere you could drag me half across the room your six attendants might think fit to dispute your worship's method of treating a comrade; the second, because I have never done you injury."

"No injury, you scoundrel," said the young soldier, in a towering passion. "Do you call it none to have seized me on the highway, to have bound me to my mule, to have brought me here as a prisoner, and to have robbed me of my property?"

"You might have added," said Perez, with a half smile, "and given you a supper and breakfast fit for the Dean of St. Jago. But I repeat I have done you no injury whatever. Do you remember our contract at Irun?"

“Perfectly ; you were to convey me safe and sound to Madrid.”

“Precisely : and it is the part of a trusty arriero to keep his word.”

“*Caramba!* do you call this fulfilling it?”

“I do at least my best towards it, and your worship can ask no more.”

“You propose, therefore, Senor Perez,” said Clifford, in a mocking tone, “still to conduct me to the end of my journey?”

“I do. It is for that purpose I came hither.”

“And my property? If you stand upon your duty as an arriero you are bound also to guarantee that.”

“Of your property hereafter ; I have at present but to address myself to the safety of your worship’s person.”

“I have first, most illogical sir, to learn that it is threatened by any but yourself.”

“It is ; but by a simple process I will secure it. I am about to change you so, that your worst enemies would not recognise you. I know the secret of a wash which will give you the colour of one of my tribe, and to-night, as

a Gitano, and in their dress, will you enter the capital."

"What ! stain myself till I am as black as a Moor, and clothe myself in your rags !" said the impatient envoy. "Never, I tell you, never !" and he paced the apartment with indignation.

"And why not ?" replied Perez, with a half smile. "As far as rags go, your worship's velvet jacket since we came through the scrub is nearly as tattered, with all respect, be it is spoken, as the clothing of my friends below ; and as to the face-staining, that has been adopted, when occasion needed, by caballeros of as high lineage as a ——," and he paused for a moment while he looked at Clifford with an intelligent glance, and then added, "a contrabandista."

It was impossible, however, to reconcile his companion to the proposal. He was very handsome, and naturally not unconscious of it, and like the great actor who refused to play Othello because he would be compelled to black his face, he could not make up his mind to smear over the eloquent blood of the fair forehead, which sundry titled dowagers in his boyhood had touched with an admiring lip, as they

kissed him, for his mother's sake. To say the truth, had the fair lady of Irun not been in the way the struggle would have been less determined ; but she seemed to possess the principle of ubiquity ; and to be seen by her, looking like one of what in after years Charles Lamb called "innocent blacknesses," was too much for his philosophy. Again he stoutly refused to accede to the proposition. The resolution, notwithstanding the energetic tone in which it was worded and delivered, seemed in no degree to discompose Perez ; and in his usual quiet tone he repeated,

"Your worship will consent."

"Never, I tell you."

Perez nodded and smiled.

Clifford lost his temper.

"What do you mean, you rascal, by nodding and smiling. I have suffered evil enough at your hands, and am not going to finish my career by having myself painted like the devil at a Funcion, when the monks get up a puppet-show and bring the horned fiend upon the stage to terrify the ladies."

Again Perez repeated his pantomimic expressions of dissent.

“Oh! now I understand you,” said the infuriated soldier. “You intend to bring your six *ratones* to your aid, and do the disguising against my will. Well, I deny not they have the power, and I must submit to force;” and he folded his arms and drew himself up in an attitude intended to convey the idea of a dignified submission to unavoidable misfortune.

Once more Perez smiled.

“No, your worship,” said he, “I meant that the staining and the dressing would be done willingly and with your own consent.”

“Never! I repeat a thousand times, never! You have the greater force on your side, and can vanquish the efforts of a weak body, but you have no power over the mind,” and again he assumed the air of a magnanimous submission to an evil destiny.

The attitude, imposing as it was intended to be, produced no effect upon the Gitano. He smiled quietly as before, and continued in his usual calm tone,

“Your worship is resolved; but what are resolutions against the powers of magic? Our tribe possess spells.”

“Use them.”

“ We have the *hokkano baro*.”

“ I defy it.”

“ In one minute it will produce obedience.”

“ Again I laugh at it.”

“ Nay, then, the strength of my art must show itself.”

With these words Perez crossed his arms so as to place his two hands within the bosom of his vest : he then withdrew them, clasped them together, and placed them upon the table.

“ I am about,” said he, “ to show you the order of my master spirit ; but you must promise me not to touch it.”

“ Willingly,” replied Clifford, in a contemptuous tone ; “ I have no wish to become the possessor of your fooleries.”

“ Be it a bargain, then ; and now read your destiny.”

He withdrew his hands as he spoke, and displayed beneath it a small slip of paper. Clifford approached it, and to his unutterable astonishment, read in the well-known handwriting of the British ambassador, the following words:—

“ To C. C.,

“ Obey the orders of the bearer.

“ STANHOPE.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CITY GATE.

GREAT, however, as was his surprise, he did not hesitate for a moment how to act. The habits of his military life had accustomed him to discipline, and he was aware that it was not less necessary in his new career than in his old. As to the authenticity of the document, he could not doubt it. He was too well acquainted with the handwriting of Lord Stanhope. With regard to the means by which it had found its way into the possession of the Gitano he asked no questions. He had been warned before he left Paris that, engaged, as he was, in a secret mission, it might be necessary to communicate with him by agents very different from those

generally employed in diplomacy, and who themselves would be ignorant alike of his real character, or the effect of the orders they conveyed. Clifford at once arrived at the conclusion that the gipsy was one of these agents, and resolved to obey.

“Your magicians are more powerful than I dreamt of,” said he, laughingly, to the gipsy, “and I own myself unable to resist their spell. When go we to Madrid?”

“At midday, if it be that the dye be dry by that time, for it is not every day that we can get within the walls, and we have an opportunity to-night.”

“Come, then,” said Clifford, “try your hand at once at the paint-brush. You are no doubt a Spanish artist, but I scarce think that you will prove a Velasquez or a Murillo.”

“I have heard tell, *senor*, of these *caballeros*,” said Perez, in reply, “and that they were great men in their art, but they had to deal with inanimate canvas, and I measure not myself with them; but for painting a living man, I yield to no artist in Spain.”

As he spoke, he left the chamber, and returned shortly after, bearing a stone pitcher

of water and a pipkin of the same material. Into the later he emptied some powders which he mixed up carefully, and proceeded to dye with it the face, the neck, and hands of the young soldier. With a liquid of a more glutinous character he painted the eyebrow, and moustache, and whiskers, and the lower portion of the hair.

“ It is but rough work, your worship, but the job requires no great care, for you will be seen only by lamp-light, so sit down for an hour, and in that time the dye will have taken enough consistency. In the meanwhile I will go prepare your dress.”

He shortly after returned, bearing with him the garments in question. They were not very attractive, and their future wearer glanced at them with an eye which indicated something of repugnance. His guide interpreted the look correctly.

“ Your worship need not be alarmed,” said he, with a smile ; “ the dress was my own, and, though old, it is clean, for it has been purposely washed for the senor’s use. As to the rags, the more tatters the better. It would be but bad policy to flash a new suit before the eyes of

those greedy leeches, the soldiers, at the Puerta de Funcaral."

As soon as the dye which had been applied to his skin was dried, Clifford proceeded to invest himself in his disguise. The suit in its main features corresponded to that which he laid aside, for the dress of the people of the Peninsula varies little in its general character throughout the rural districts of Spain. It consisted of a *zamarra*, or jacket of untanned sheep skin, with the wool turned outwards; a waistcoat of what apparently had been once a gaudy pattern, but which, stained and worn, possessed little of its primitive colour; a pair of large and full breeches of coarse brown cloth, buttoning at the knee, and patched there and elsewhere with pieces of stuff of a colour in no degree corresponding to that of the original garment, coarse-ribbed brown stockings, and high shoes much the worse for wear. The dress was put on; the Gitano assisting in the toilet: and, "Now," said he, as he looked approvingly at his handiwork, "your worship is complete, except your sash, your knife, and your hat. This *faja* was of crimson silk once, and will encircle your worship's waist gallantly; and

there is the navaja," said he, passing as he spoke a large long sheathed knife of a most suspicious appearance within the silken girdle. "And now for the sombrero; your worship by rights should wear a Montero cap, and with its high peak, and your own height together, you would have looked a gallant caballero; but, to say the truth, you are too tall for a Gitano already, and the narrow brim of the montero would show too much of your face, so I thought it best to give you one of my muleteer hats. It is very broad in the brim, and, as the beaver has been a good deal knocked about, it laps well over the eyes, which is convenient: and now, your worship, we have a gallop of nine leagues before us, and the sooner we are off the better."

Clifford professed his readiness to start, and asked no questions either with regard to what had become of his property or their future route, or even as to the fair dame whose appearances were so mysterious, and who had taken such interest in his fortunes. "I suspect," said he to himself, "that Lord Stanhope has more agents in Spain than I was aware of, and I must for the present trust to their guidance."

Thus abandoning himself passively to events he left the room, and followed his guide down stairs to the court-yard. The inhabitants, who had tenanted it so densely, had disappeared, and nothing spoke of their presence but the marks of their fires, and some rags and well-gnawed bones which were scattered up and down under the arcades. From a deserted room which opened from it, Perez led forth the two mules. They had been well cared for; and were in high condition. To the pommel of Clifford's saddle was attached a rough blanket coat with loose sleeves, but there were no fire-arms. The double-barrelled rifle and the pistol had, to all appearance, followed the envoy's credentials.

“And now to the saddle, your worship,” said the gipsy. “We have a rough ride before us, and it is better to do it in the daylight than in the dark.”

So saying he mounted, and Clifford followed his example. The gipsy struck off at a rapid pace. For an hour he took his way through a broken country, seemingly the spurs of the sierra, for the travellers ascended and descended repeatedly low hills, bounded upon either side

by mountain torrents, which poured their waters from the range into the plain below. At length they seemed to approach the low country, for a high ridge, at the summit of which they had arrived, gave them an unbroken view of everything to the south and to the east, and here the Gitano drew rein.

“ You may light a cigarito, *senor*,” said he. “ We will here give the poor beasts five minutes’ breathing-time. It has been a hard hour’s work ; but I was obliged to avoid the main road, as there are hawks abroad. There,” said he, as he extended his hand to the left, “ is San Agustin, where your worship intended to sleep last night ; and yonder,” continued he, turning to the south, and pointing to some spires of churches which were visible in the distance through the clear horizon, “ is Madrid, six good leagues off. But it is all flat country now, and the mules will do the work easily enough.”

The Gitano once more resumed his journey, followed by his companion : half an hour’s riding brought them to the foot of the range. With it the forest disappeared, and before them extended a long, flat, sandy plain, un-

broken by fence or timber, and across this the travellers moved at a rapid pace. The rains however of the preceding day had made the ground heavy, and the sun had long set ere they reached a ruined house about half a league from the capital.

It appeared to be occupied, for the light of a fire showed itself through the broken windows. Perez, however, seemed suspicious, for he pulled up his mule a few yards off, and uttered a low cry. It was the same note of the owl which had startled Clifford on the night of his conference with Donna Teresa, at Buitrago. It was immediately responded to in a similar tone.

"All's well," said the guide, and followed by Clifford, he rode his mule right into the house.

The apartment within was tenanted by four men in the gipsy garb, whom Clifford recognised at once as a portion of those who had attended him in the Moorish tower. They welcomed their prisoner with a grim smile, and then turning to his guide, answered some questions which he eagerly put to them. The interrogations and the reply were in the Rom-

many dialect, and of course unintelligible, but one phrase occurred often. It was "La Tuerta," and seemed the name of some person who was to act an important part in the night's drama. The information, whatever it was, appeared satisfactory, for Perez laughed gaily and rubbed his hands.

"You must remain here for two hours, *senor*," said he. "We are to be at the Puerta de Funcaral by eight o'clock. In the meanwhile I have provided for your worship's entertainment;" and he produced from his wallet a roast partridge, the brother probably of that which had furnished the breakfast table in the old tower, a loaf of bread, and a bottle of Valdepenas. These he placed beside Clifford, while he and his comrades contented themselves by making their supper on bread of Indian corn and onions, washed down by some country-wine of an inferior quality. The repast over, the party betook themselves to their *cigaritos*, and for upwards of an hour sat smoking in silence. At length, as seven o'clock approached, Perez rose.

"It is time for your worship to be going," said he, "for we have half a league to do on foot,

and the ground is miry ; so tie your mantle over your left shoulder, there just so, it should hang exactly like a hussar's over-jacket ; and now remember, whatever you see or hear, say nothing ; and recollect, keep your head low, and let as little of the light get under the brim of your hat as may be. And now, brothers," continued he, turning to his companions, "to work."

He left the house, followed by Clifford and three of the Gitanos. The fourth remained behind, probably to take care of the mules. Perez moved at a rapid pace, and notwithstanding the darkness of the night, with an unhesitating step which marked his intimate acquaintance with the localities. After about half-an-hour's walking, the party approached the city, for occasional voices were heard, and here and there lights seen from the windows. About two hundred yards from the wall was a small enclosure of stone, probably intended for a cattle pen, and again as he approached it Perez uttered his low owl-like cry. It was replied to as before, but this time the voice of the speaker had a shrillness in the tone which seemed to denote that it came from the other sex. And so it proved, for some half-dozen

gipsy women issued from the building. A few sentences in Rommany were interchanged between them and the guide. They had, in all probability, reference to Clifford, for the swarthy dames crowded round him, and their piercing black eyes seemed to flash even in the night, as each in turn peered under the brim of his sombrero. The examination seemed satisfactory, especially to the youngest of the fair spies, who after having curiously raised the hat to assist her in her investigation, exclaimed, "*Es hermoso, me gusta mucho!*" The naiveté of the girl's admiration awoke the laughter of her companions, but it was instantly repressed, for at that moment the great clock of the church of the Atocha convent began to peal forth the hour of eight. As the first stroke of its hammer came upon the ear, Perez started, exclaiming, "Have done with folly, muchachas, we are late!"

He left the ruin as he spoke, and followed by the whole party, hurried to the gate. The last sounds of the noble bell were still pealing as he reached it, and he instantly made his presence known by rapping at it and demanding admission.

"*Vaya!* Here's an ado," said a soldier as he looked over the top of the low wall, "who is it who would enter the city to night? *Ratones* no doubt—pick-purses: from the highway, who want to sell their booty. Go to the devil with your impudence, I will not undraw a bolt."

"Fair sir, beautiful sir!" said a female voice from Clifford's elbow, "you will not be so cruel as to keep honest folks from their houses in such weather; and you of all men, Senor Lopez, with those charming eyes of yours that would win the love of a princess. You to be so hard-hearted."

"They are Gitanos!" shouted the infuriated janitor; "better and better, and with all the edicts of our Lord the King out against them to have the audacity to present themselves at the Puerta de Funcaral. And the girl knows my name too. They are sorceresses. *Caramba!*—They are sorceresses, and have dealings with the Evil One," and the soldier crossed himself devoutly as if to protect himself from the danger of their presence.

The gipsies, however, were not to be so easily repulsed. The woman, who had apparently been selected as the orator of the

party, returned to the charge, and lavished upon the janitor above, with whose person she was clearly acquainted, a thousand caressing speeches, painting his features in turn from eye to chin, in language eulogistic enough to have described an Antinous, and hinting at his success with the fair sex in inuendoes, which, to judge from the exclamations of astonishment or horror which occasionally burst from the soldier, were too accurate to have been the result of chance. At length the clamour seemed to arouse the attention of others of the guardians of the gate, for a voice as of the officer in command was heard asking the cause of dispute.

“’Tis some Gitanos, Don Antonio,” said the first speaker in reply. “Some heathen hounds, who want to enter the city.”

“Keep them outside, Lopez,” said the officer. “Weather like this will serve to cool their cantrips. But now I think of it,” he added, as if some recollection suddenly struck him, “I will hold conference with the scoundrels. Halloo! below there!”

“What would your worship?” replied Perez, in a tone of the most cringing subserviency.

“You are Gitanos.”

“Your worship is right. We are of the Errate.”

“It is well. Now will I let you inside if you can answer my question. They tell me that there is a young caballero, a contrabandista, who is travelling from Irun to Madrid, in company with one of your accursed race. He was last seen on the Somo Sierra. Can you tell me any thing of him?”

Perez nudged Clifford with his elbow ere he replied. He then answered—

“Alas ! señor, I know nothing of him, or of any other traveller, I am a poor artisan who live in the city. It was but yesterday I saw your worship ride up the Calle Alcalá on your mottled grey. The Cid could not have looked a more gallant caballero.”

“None of your compliments, you scoundrel,” cried the worthy captain of the gate, not however the less gratified by the flattery “If I am not the Cid, I am as noble a gentleman, and may be more so. But come, I will help your memory. I have a wish to see that said contrabandista, and you shall have ten crowns if you can help me to lay hand

upon him, for orders have come from his Eminence the Cardinal for his arrest."

Again Perez nudged Clifford, but ere the Gitano was able to repeat his assurances of his ignorance of the party for whose apprehension so much anxiety was expressed, the commandant was summoned to the interior, and thither we must follow him.

In a small room attached to the gate-house, and appropriated to the officer of the guard, was a woman of about sixty. She was slightly bent with age, but the glance of her eye, and the occasional movement of her limbs, still showed abundance of latent energy. She wore the dress usual with the gipsy tribes, the short voluminous bright-coloured petticoat, the dark vandyked boddice, the crimson handkerchief tied over the head; while the neck, notwithstanding her age, was still bare and encircled with a gay-coloured scarf. In her hand was a basket full of ribands, the talisman which opened the doors of half the houses in Madrid to this emissary of the god of love. In one respect at least she was no unfit representative of the blind deity, for she had herself, as her name, "La Tuerta," signified, but a single eye, which

bright, piercing, restless, and now fierce and now fawning, was no bad index of the character of its possessor. She stood in the corner of the room, motionless as a statue, and intimated her consciousness of Don Antonio's approach only by a slight and grave nod of the head.

The worthy commandant was more flurried. Hastily shutting the door, he hurried towards the gipsy, and in a voice which abundantly showed his agitation, he said—

“What news, Pepa? Do you bring me happiness at last? Will Donna Clara see me? Have I any hope of melting her flinty heart?”

Pepa smiled slightly.

“My people,” said she, “are interested. If I bring joy to the cavalier, what is to be my reward?”

“All I can give,” said Don Antonio, eagerly. “If it be a message—”

“A couple of crowns you would say. But if it be a letter?”—and the gipsy looked interrogatively.

The young officer's eyes flashed with pleasure. “You do not say so? You cannot mean it?” said he.

The gipsy nodded.

“This ring,” continued the soldier, as he drew one from his finger, “would be but a poor guerdon for such a gift.”

“Well,” returned his fair companion, “it will suffice. Yet, ere I give you the letter, let me ask how it was, if you are so anxious to hear from your lady love, you kept the messenger so long waiting? Our appointment was for eight.”

“True, true, true,” said the conscious lover, with something of a blush; “but I was kept at the gate. Some Gitanos wished to enter.

“And you have given them permission?”

“It is impossible; the laws are severe. I might have done so,” muttered he to himself, “on certain conditions; but then the Cardinal would have borne me out.”

“You a lover!” said the gipsy, contemptuously; “I will tell Donna Clara that you do not deserve the name. And this letter,” and she half drew one from the bosom of her boddice, “shall be returned to her who sent it.”

The exclamations of the unfortunate soldier at the cruelty of the gipsy, were, as may be supposed, loud enough; but they were un-

availing. The messenger refused to part with her precious missive, except on her own terms. But it is easy to guess the result. Don Antonio was but five-and-twenty, and at five-and-twenty love carries the day. To gain the longed-for letter, bolts were drawn and bars fell, and Clifford and his party were permitted to enter, unremarked by any but honest Lopez, who crossed himself devoutly as they passed, muttering, as he fixed his eyes upon the female travellers, "Sorceresses — very sorceresses, or how could they have known that I was walking in the Buen Retiro last fête-day with Francesca, the grocer's daughter!"

In the mean time the travellers moved rapidly up the Calle de Funcaral. As they passed along, the gipsies gradually fell off on either side, till at length Clifford was left alone with Perez.

The young soldier had asked no questions as to his destination. Prior to his capture and robbery, his own plans had been distinct enough. Before leaving Paris, the British ambassador, through the medium of a resident in Madrid, who had been a spy of the English Government during the war, and who still

continued to act as their agent, had taken for his representative, apartments in the house of a person whose discretion could be depended on. They were in a retired street, at no great distance from the Puerta del Sol, a central situation, which would enable the embryo diplomatist to communicate easily with the palace, or with any of the nobility with whom he might find it to be politic to connect himself. The street was called the Calle de la Cabeza. To this sundry boxes had been sent, filled with dresses of different ranks so as to afford disguises to the future lodger, should he find it necessary to assume them. To guard against accidents, no note had been made in writing of the address; but Clifford had carefully got by heart the name of the proprietor of the house, its number in the street, and the floor which it occupied in the tenement itself: a matter the more easy as from his long residence in Madrid he was intimately acquainted not only with its leading thoroughfares, but its more minute by-lanes.

Of the quarters selected for him he had of course said nothing to his guide. He was a good deal surprised, therefore, to find the

Gitano, on leaving the Calle de Funcaral, move in a direct line towards his intended residence. As Perez advanced, his destination became less and less doubtful. He passed with a rapid step through the Puerta del Sol, keeping at a distance from the few lamps that lighted it, moved up the Calle de las Carretas, crossed the street of Atocha, and turning short to the left, entered that of the Cabeza. Still going onwards, he stopped at the entrance of a small gloomy-looking house on the right-hand, and rang a bell. The portal was opened by a latch raised by a cord connected with some story above. Up the steps unhesitatingly went the gipsy, still followed by his companion, till they reached the second floor. There an open door awaited them, at which with a candle in his hand, stood an elderly man of grave aspect. He touched his chin and rubbed his right ear. Clifford answered the secret signal by a corresponding gesture, and in another minute he was ushered into a room where a lamp was burning, and in the centre of which was a brazier heaped with charcoal. At the further end of the apartment were some boxes which he recognized as having last seen in

Paris ; but on a table near them was an object which at once made every other a matter of indifference, and towards which he sprung with a half-uttered cry ; for there lay the repository of the treasures of his mission—the packet of packets, which had been so mysteriously taken from him in the Moorish tower. Eagerly did he turn to learn from his guide the cause of its loss and its restoration, but once more his curiosity was destined to be baffled. Perez had disappeared.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON :

Printed by Schulze and Co., 13 Poland Street.

